



Bethany Columbus

Type of Cancer: Acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL with a chromosome change)

Age at diagnosis: 12

Current age: 14

Occupation: Student

Bethany's advice: Believe in yourself, and you will make it.

Bethany's Cancer Journey

It all started when the health nurses came to vaccinate the kids at my school with the hepatitis B vaccine. After I had the vaccination, I always seemed to have sinus colds. I didn't go to the doctor because I thought, "Well, its winter, and lots of people have colds."

March break came, and I went to my aunt's house with my brother to stay for a couple of nights. When I came home, I was really stuffed up, and every time I blew my nose, there was blood. I thought it was because my aunt's house is really dry and she smokes. Then one day, my mom took me to the doctor because my skin looked yellow. My doctor said I had blood in my nose because I was constantly blowing it and that I was yellow from blowing so much. The doctor also said I had a sinus cold and put me on antibiotics. They seemed to help, but once I was off of the antibiotics, the sinus cold came back.

In April, I was due for another hepatitis B shot. I was still sick, and I remembered that my health teacher said if you were sick that you shouldn't get your vaccine. I told my mom about what my health teacher said. My mom wrote a note saying that I was sick and that it was up to my health teacher's discretion. My teacher said I would be fine and threw the note out. So that day, I received the vaccine.

That Friday, as I was coming out of the car after I finished power skating, I hit the side of my leg on the door. That night, I looked at my leg and saw a very big bruise. Saturday came, and I went power skating again. I was having a hard time keeping up because I was very tired. Then I felt really sick and threw up. I went home early, and on the way home my dad said he was embarrassed and that I would never make it at anything because I was a quitter. That same day we bought some trees and planted them in the rain. I was so weak and tired, but no one would believe me. They thought I was just being lazy.

On Sunday, I went outside to play with my brother and our friends. While they built a fort, I could only sit and watch. I started to get thirsty, so I went with one of my friends to my house to get a drink. When we were walking, I felt my stomach, and it seemed bigger than normal and hard. I passed my mom and dad on the way. I showed my mom my stomach, but she didn't say anything.

My friend and I got to my house and had a drink, but then my friend had to go home. I was home by myself when my stomach started to hurt really bad. I lay on the floor and hoped it would go away, but it didn't. My cat, Nelson, was meowing and wouldn't leave my side. I was crying. I thought about going to find my parents and telling them that I needed to go to the hospital, but I thought my dad would get upset if it ended up being nothing. Times before, I went to the hospital with stomach aches and they were nothing. Then the pains got worse, and I decided I needed to find my parents.

Crying, I went outside. My neighbor asked me what was wrong, and I told him. Together, we went to find my parents. My dad asked me what was wrong. I told him that my stomach really hurt and that I needed to go to the hospital. He said they would probably take some of my blood. I knew they would.

When I got to the hospital, they took some blood and did some x-rays. They found out that both of my knees were fractured, this was caused by the cells in my marrow cramming together. I had to stay in the hospital overnight. The doctor thought it could be mono or hepatitis, but he decided to send me to a specialist at a different hospital. I was only at that hospital for four hours before I was moved to a different hospital where I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia.



I had a feeling I had leukemia because I heard some nurses talking about it in the hall. I told my dad that I thought I had leukemia and that I might even die. Then the doctor came in and told me I had leukemia. He asked me if I knew what it was and what can happen. All I knew is that I would lose my hair.

My treatments started, and I had some really hard times. I had to have surgery to have fluid drained from my right side, where an infection developed. When I woke up, I had a chest tube and one of my ribs had been removed. The infection got into the lining of my lung and one of my ribs. After surgery, I was really hungry. Not knowing I had lost a rib, I asked someone to go to a restaurant and get me some ribs. Everyone thought that was funny.

On my birthday, I got bad news from my doctor. The doctor told my parents I needed a bone marrow transplant. My mom, dad, and brother all were tested to see if they were a match, but none of them were. People we knew and people from different churches all over the world got tested. We wanted a donor as quick as possible because I had a chromosome change, which could make me relapse.

Luckily, a donor was found for me in seven weeks. All I know about my donor is that he is male and a six out of six match for me. I had a high-dose chemotherapy treatment and three days of full-body radiation, twice a day, which was done to destroy my bone marrow. It wasn't long before I was in an isolation room. I couldn't step on the floor unless there was a towel there. There was no bathroom; I had to go in a commode chair.

Soon, I had my transplant, and there was nothing to it. In fact, I slept through most of it. It was just like getting blood. After it, we were all waiting for my white blood cell counts to come up. The doctors said that a person remains in the transplant unit from 14 to 25 days, at which point the counts are high enough so the person can go to a step-down hospital unit and then home. At day 27, I was still in the transplant unit, and my doctors started to worry that the bone marrow transplant wasn't working. They thought they might have to do another transplant. My family and I were upset by this. I prayed that my counts would go up, and so did many other people. I guess it worked because that very day, my counts starting coming up and they stayed up. On day 33, I got to go to a step-down unit. After being in bed for so long, I had to learn to walk again. I also had some problems with high blood pressure and high blood sugar levels, but these problems are now gone.

I can walk. I have lots of hair. I am feeling wonderful.

Source: Teenage Cancer Journey
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