

My Story

September 14, 2018, I was diagnosed with cancer. Chronic myeloid leukemia to be exact. Being fifteen and just starting my sophomore year of high school, I was lost. How could I have cancer? Why me? Why now?

During the summer before that, I started to notice something unusual. There would be an awful agonizing pain on the left side of my stomach. I thought nothing of it and continued my life as normal, but over the next few months, the pain kept getting worse and worse. In August, I started to volunteer in the athletic training room. It was the start of school and also the start of football season. Everyday after school I would go to the trainers' room and begin my day as a student trainer. Doing this took up a huge amount of my time and became my new favorite thing to do.

September 13, 2018. It was a Thursday, and I went to school just like any other day. Right after school, I went to athletic training and waited for practice to start. The pain that I was feeling was there again. It got to the point where I could barely stand without feeling that excruciating pain. I couldn't handle it anymore. For the first time that year, I left practice early, and my brother Jacob came and picked me up.

As soon as I got home, I went to my room. I tried so hard not to cry, but I couldn't hold back my tears. Sitting in my bed I thought, *This is normal. I'm being over dramatic right now. No one needs to know.* But then my dad walked by. He saw me lying there in tears, and he called my mom. After a long talk with her over the phone, he decided it was best to drive me to the hospital. Hours went by as we sat in the waiting room trying to occupy our minds with something else. We finally got called back, and all of the tests started to begin.

It was around two in the morning when a doctor came into the room. He pulled out the swivel chair, set down his folders, and started rambling. At this very moment, my entire life changed. How I see myself, how others see me changed. When the doctor said these words, I thought it wasn't true: "You have cancer." I was speechless. How do you take in those words? How are you supposed to process this? How am I supposed to have cancer? When the doctor left the room, my mom came over, lay next to me, and we cried together. Seconds, soon minutes went by where we didn't say anything.

Shortly after that, I was admitted to the 7th floor of the hospital. The cancer level. During the next few weeks, I was heavily medicated to take away the pain. After more scans and tests, the doctors figured out that my pain was from my enlarged spleen that had grown to be the size of a nine month old baby. The type of cancer that I have created an unnecessary amount of white blood cells. That extreme amount of WBC accumulated in my spleen and made it grow out of control. My spleen could have ruptured at any moment, but we were lucky and stopped it before it did. Two weeks into my hospital visit, I had an Ng tube put down my throat. I can't put this experience into words that justify everything that I experienced during that time. One night, I broke down crying to my dad. I was angry that I had to go through this, and I couldn't understand how this was all happening. There were so many emotions that overwhelmed me.

October 22, was my first day back at school. I was so anxious and afraid about seeing everyone for the first time. The feeling that I had when I stepped onto campus was indescribable. The crowds of teenagers reappeared, mingled together, and laughed carefree as usual. I realized that the entire time I had been gone, nothing had changed. The world didn't stop or slow down even though momentarily my life had been halted. While assignments had been piling up, collecting dust with only my name written on it, the rest of my peers continued their educations

seemingly unaware of the value of life. The feeling of being lost overwhelmed me. Finishing out the school year was the hardest thing. I was still on medication when I came back so I couldn't focus, I couldn't even read more than a paragraph. Concentrating on the simplest thing was something I had to work on and still do to this day. My diagnosis has brought a lot of daily struggles, the most difficult one being my memory loss. After months of being on countless medications, I was left with a foggy brain. I haven't found a way to overcome this problem yet, but I'm certain I will through lots of hard work.

After a couple of months being out of the hospital and being back in school, I was able to start volunteering again. I could finally be a student athletic trainer just like I had before I was diagnosed. Being in that environment, aiding with injured athletes, inspired me to pursue a career in nursing. When I finish college, I plan to become a registered nurse, and then continue my education to be a nurse anesthetist. The thought of being able to go to college and grow up despite my diagnosis is something I greatly look forward to.

This experience has helped me realize my purpose is to help others. Becoming a nurse will help me make an impact on someone else's life. All the pain, suffering, and uncertainty was preparing me for something bigger than myself. Through all of this, I learned that when life pushes you, you just have to push it back a little harder.