

30 Days/30 Stories®

Abby

Diagnosed with advanced bilateral retinoblastoma before age 1

A cancer diagnosis is devastating, but when that diagnosis is attached to your baby's name, it is absolutely earth-shattering. My Abby was diagnosed with advanced bilateral retinoblastoma (cancer of the retinas) on February 2, 2012, just 22 days before her 1st birthday. Some of the first steps that she took were in the exam room where a doctor would later sit in front of me, hold my hands, and tell me that my baby had cancer and would need to start treatment immediately. Somehow the words, "is she going to die" came out of my mouth, and as they did, I couldn't believe what I was asking. Just last week, I was planning her 1st birthday party. I wanted to grab her and run out of that building and never look back.

The next couple of days were filled with an MRI to make sure the cancer hadn't escaped the eye (if it had, the survival rate is terrible), meeting the oncologist at CHOP, and trying to adjust to this new "normal" that we had been thrown into. I learned a completely new vocabulary filled with words that I never wanted to know. The oncologist at CHOP and Dr. Shields created a treatment plan for Abby. She would need six months of systemic chemotherapy in conjunction with monthly visits to Wills Eye Hospital where she would be sedated and receive additional treatment as needed. All I needed to hear was that six months. I obsessed over it and, in my head, this would all be over by July, she would be cured, and I could put all of this behind me.

Cancer had other plans. Systemic chemotherapy did end after the six months, but the other treatments, the chemotherapy that they injected directly into her eyeballs and made her eyes swell shut for an entire month did not end. Imagine trying to explain to a 16 month-old baby why she can't see. The incredible doctors at Wills Eye Hospital could not seem to get the cancer in her eyes under control, and we started to have conversations about the possibility that Abby could possibly lose both of her eyes to save her life. To think that Abby might not get to experience sunsets, the waves crashing onto the beach, and shooting stars. She would never remember what I looked like or how beautiful the world can be completely shattered my heart. But the reality was if she was going to lose her vision, it was because the doctors were saving her life.

Close to 7 years later, Abby is thriving. She has been cancer-free since November 8, 2013 when doctors removed her right eye to prevent her cancer from spreading. Abby is like any other 8 year-old. Most people have no idea that she has a prosthetic eye and only has vision in one eye. The way that she can hit and catch a softball is amazing. She is unbelievable in every single way and I am beyond grateful that I was chosen to me her mommy.

Written by Abby's mom, Kristen

If you would like to donate in Abby's honor Click Here

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