

30 Days/30 Stories®

Angel

Diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia at the age of 10

My name is Jose. I like to be called Angel, but my mom calls me "Bebe." I was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL) at the age of 10. That's the day my whole life changed. My parents and I did not know that I was going to reside in heaven sooner than expected. My cancer journey began after my mom saw dark and purple bruises on my legs, and I also had little tiny dots on my chest. That's when my parents rushed me to a local emergency room.

The doctor told my parents I had some form of leukemia, but he couldn't diagnose which one. I was rushed to St. Christopher Hospital in an ambulance with doctors and nurses. I didn't know what was going on, but I knew my parents did because they were not laughing, and I could never forget their faces.

The first 3 years of high-dose chemotherapy were very exhausting. I received so many medicines that made me feel so sick, and of course, I lost my hair so many times that there was a time that it didn't make a diference. After the 3-year treatment, cancer came back more aggressively. This time, I needed a bone marrow transplant.

My parents and I went to St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, and I received a bone marrow transplant on February 28, 2012 from a non-related donor. My transplant was the hardest thing I had done, and I even told my mom it felt that I was dying, but I was not. I went through whole-body irradiation for five days for 45 minutes twice a day plus an extra 15 minutes irradiating the genital area since I'm a boy and cancer cells like to hide in the hardest places.

I got very sick, but I knew it was worth it. I kept fighting because I kept thinking I have so many things to do. I wanted to get well, go back to school, and follow my dream to become a veterinarian. After getting very sick from the transplant, I started to feel better and soon came back home. We drove from Memphis, Tennessee to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and I was so happy to see my brothers, nieces, family, and friends, I would never forget that day.

We were traveling to St.Jude every 3 weeks and weekly appointments at St. Christopher 's for check-ups. We had a wonderful Thanksgiving dinner with all of our family. That's a day I would never forget since all of our family members came to see me. It made me feel so special. After everyone left, my mom was doing the dishes, and I thanked her because she worked very hard to make everything pleasant for everyone, especially for me.

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After an amazing day of Thanksgiving, my cancer came back differently…in a way that I didn't have many options. On December 4, 2012, I was officially diagnosed with a refractory/systemic leukemia…not in my marrow but everywhere in my body. I went to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia to receive CART-19 which I was infused with three times…my own engineered cells to attack cancer. The infusions were not successful, and my body was worn down from all the treatments.

I decided to go back home, be surrounded by my family, especially my nieces, since my opportunity to see them grow was extinguished. I came home by ambulance on July 22, 2013, and everyone was happy except my mom since she knew this was my last stop before going to heaven. I tried to cheer her up. I kept repeating to her that I was going to heaven where cancer and pain do not exist. Even though she smiled, I knew she was heartbroken.

My journey continues today. I reside in heaven where cancer does not exist, and I am free of pain. Many people think I lost the battle to cancer but the reality is that I won the battle. There is only one way of seeing things. You just have to close your eyes and see with your heart, and believe that someday my mom and I will be reunited and she will smile again.

Written by Jose, "Angel", "Bebe's" mom, Brenda

- for all the kids that are fighting and for the ones that reside in heaven

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

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