

30 Days/30 Stories®

Dylan

The Krums' Story Part 1: Dylan

In May of 2010, Dylan was a 14 year-old teenager just finishing his 8th Grade year. As a family, we began the month with a special celebration, taking a limo into NYC where we saw "The Lion King," as a surprise for "Dad's 50th Birthday."

After enjoying the whole happy day and talking on the way home about what kind of summer plans we would look forward to together, Dylan mentioned that he had a sore throat. We chalked it up to a busy teenager who had been involved in a lot of activities over those past few months, and the typical spring "bugs" going around. He missed a few days of school and went to the pediatrician, who prescribed a typical course of antibiotics. We were all a little puzzled as the week went on and Dylan hadn't really improved, and in fact, seemed to be feeling worse. With a persistent fever and declining appetite, we went back to the doctor a second time, and Dylan was prescribed a new antibiotic. We kept him home from school and told him to rest, try to drink fluids and eat a little.

His condition continued to get worse, and as we were facing more than 2 weeks of this already, we figured it was time to take him to the ER to hopefully get him hydrated and on whatever kind of stronger meds that might help him get back to his normal, cheerful self. After the initial examination in the ER, it seemed like all of a sudden a lot of other doctors began to come by, and as they were preparing to admit him, they sent him for some scans, which we assumed might be just normal protocol. The next morning, there was the order for a biopsy to be done, so as we prepared Dylan and ourselves for this procedure, we were still sure that all of this was just to rule out something strange...and even the surgeon came out and assured us that what he saw seemed like things were "okay."

The next afternoon, however, two doctors came into Dylan's hospital room and told us that he had "Pediatric Follicular Lymphoma," and, although they continued to talk and explain things, my mind was stuck on those first three words that I heard. A diagnosis like this was not ever something I thought was going to happen, and like any parents, we were crushed, frightened and concerned...as we tried to calmly assure Dylan that this was going to just be a "bump in the road."

There is an image seared deep into my mind, of Dylan's eyes looking at me as the doctors walked out of the room, as he cried and asked, "Will I ever get to go home?" Somehow, I leaped from the couch I was sitting on and into his hospital bed before I could even think...and, as I choked back my tears, I assured him, "of course we'll get home!" as I looked into his eyes, trying to be convincing, but seeing his eyes stare back at me with uncertainty.

As it turned out, they scheduled a bronchoscopy procedure for the very next morning, in order to determine how much Dylan's lungs were affected, and Dave and I will never forget walking along side of him as he was wheeled into the OR again for the second time in one week, and kissing his forehead and telling him we'd see him as soon as the procedure was over. We walked the halls of the hospital, in a daze, waiting to hear that everything went well and that he was okay.

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When we checked back about going to see him in recovery, they told us that they would be bringing him directly to a new room in the PICU, and we could go wait for him there. I really cannot remember if we were told anything else or not, or if I just didn't process anything else, but upon seeing Dylan be wheeled into his room, I let out such a loud and guttural scream, unlike anything I've ever known myself to do. I continued to be hysterical as I saw my son on a ventilator. I felt like this had to have been the very worst thing I would ever have to see in my entire life.

The days in the PICU were scary, yet hopeful at first. Dylan's PICC line was put in, and they began the beginning chemo treatments while he remained intubated. Everyone on the medical staff was very caring and thorough, and we never doubted that he was getting the very best care We kept on plugging along, believing that if we continued to "follow the plan" and kept a positive attitude, everything would work out as we hoped!

Finally, a day in early June came around, and we stood in the room as the Intensivist removed the breathing tube. It was an amazing relief and joy to see our son's sweet smile, hear his voice and see him take a few sips of Sprite. We tried to explain that while he was on the ventilator, a dental specialist came in and removed his braces. He told us that he knew there were still a couple of brackets on his back teeth. Every time we tried to "catch him up" on the weeks he was in the medically-induced coma, he responded that he was aware of all that had happened.

He soon was taken up to a "regular" room again, and his chemo treatments continued. As a squeamish boy who hated shots and fussed over taking the smallest pill, he had instantly become one of the most courageous warriors I've ever known, as he watched bags of medicines get hooked up and pumped through his veins...and as he heroically struggled to swallow pills much bigger than anyone should ever have to ingest. He worked so hard, and it was obvious that as the treatments continued, it was taking a major toll on him...physically and emotionally. We tried to encourage...maybe even pressure him...to continue swallowing pills, try to eat, get up and take a walk...but it was getting increasingly harder. He was receiving cards, signs, gifts from classmates, friends, church members. We assured him that we'd "make it up to him," as he was missing all of the fun and exciting times…as the 8th Grade Class held its farewell dance, went on a class field trip, received awards, etc. We brought his awards in for him, and he quietly looked at them as we told him how proud we were of him.

Then came the day when I had been home overnight with his 12 year-old brother, Gavin, and ran to the store to pick up some treats for him before coming back to the hospital. When I walked in the room, hoping to see his big smile, and wanting him to grab the package of EL Fudge cookies I brought for him, I saw the saddest look on my boy's face. He wouldn't talk. I asked him what was wrong, and all he could do is point to his head, to show me that his hair was falling out, in big clumps. Upon telling him how handsome he still was, I asked him if he'd like me to go shopping for a special hat for him. His silent response was just the nod of his head.

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We spent the rest of that weekend together, enjoying some games, movies and sharing a plate of nachos and cheese (that he took just a few nibbles of). That Sunday evening, I once again was taking Gavin home, and we promised Dylan we were going directly to the store to buy him a hat, and would bring it back the very next day. Once we were home, and settled for the night, the phone rang and Dave told me that I should probably get back down to the hospital because they decided that Dylan should be taken back to the PICU once again. I scurried to find someone to come in the middle of the night, to stay with Gavin, and then drove back to see Dylan in the PICU again and Dave sitting by his side. We could see him struggling to breathe, and watched hard working nurses and staff treating him with care and intent. As the day progressed to evening, his conditioned continued to get worse and worse, and we were told that he was going to once again be put on the ventilator. I demanded that they let me back in to explain this to him, and I remember telling him that it would help him feel better for now, as I kissed him on the forehead once again. I cried and cried as we waited, for what seemed like the longest time, until the procedure was once again done. And then we went back into his room to see him once again in this paralytic state. I kept telling myself that it would get better again.

The next few weeks were a roller coaster. We'd rejoice every time the smallest thing would go right, and try our best to keep our prayers and thoughts positive...but, after a few weeks of watching him struggle, and learning that more and more of his organs were shutting down, there came the day when we heard something we never imagined could happen...and, as we sat with him, sang to him, talked and prayed, telling him how wonderful of a son he is, we were waiting, knowing that his heart would eventually stop beating.

It was the most difficult thing we had ever faced...nothing could be worse. From walking out of the hospital without him, to walking into our quiet house...to telling his brother what he had already figured out. Every day since then, we have lived with the pain of missing him, the trauma of what happened in 56 days in the hospital, and the grief that we instantly knew would last a lifetime.

Before May 20, 2010, we never imagined that pediatric cancer would affect our family in any way. And on July 15, we had learned in the most horrible way how pediatric cancer steals the life away from children and their families. We are forever sad that any child needs to face this...and we hope and pray that there will soon be an improvement to cancer treatments for children, and that there will also be an END to pediatric cancer!

Written by Dylan's parents, Lora and Dave

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

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