

30 Days/30 Stories®

Gavin

The Krums' Story Part 2: Gavin'

Our family had already been beaten up, badly, because of pediatric cancer. As a 12 year-old younger brother, Gavin had experienced firsthand what it's like to be a sibling who is confused, concerned and passed around while his parents are in the hospital with another child. We were forced to walk through the world looking like a "family of three," with a very deep hole representing the absence of our Dylan, who had died in July of 2010 from pediatric cancer...he was missing from us, due to the two months of horror that happened just two years before we got to the point of our younger son, Gavin, becoming ready to enter eighth grade...the grade that his brother never finished. Gavin was forced to grow up, very quickly, in the summer of 2010, as he faced life circumstances which are harder than what many adults ever need to experience.

He went back to school that fall with a heavy heart. Each day, just the usual routines that he was used to sharing with his brother, Dylan, were tough to get through. Fortunately, his teachers and school were supportive and compassionate, and we were grateful that he found friendships and activities where he could feel accepted as he was and given healthy distractions from the heaviness he often felt at home, as the three of us grieved.

The three of us continued to move along, remembering Dylan together. We often would look to Gavin to take part in making decisions to family traditions, like Christmas and vacations, and we experienced growth in ways we wish we never would have needed to. As we found ways to cope with our grief and move along through life, we finally got to the point where a family vacation seemed like a possibility again...especially if we "carried" Dylan with us, in memory, as we were doing in every other aspect of our life in grief.

It was the summer of 2012, just after the second angel anniversary for Dylan, when we set out on a "trip of a lifetime." We spent time in California before flying to Hawaii and then to Arizona, where we took a train ride to the Grand Canyon. We were gone for almost a month, keeping the memory of Dylan alive in each new experience. A few days after returning home, Gavin came downstairs one morning and it seemed like just overnight a lump appeared on his neck. We were shocked to see something like this, and worked hard to make our minds believe that it was nothing to worry about. We tried, as best as we could, to live in a "normal" way as Gavin went back to school to begin his eighth grade year.

After a couple of visits to the ENT and finally a suggestion of a biopsy, it seemed like it was time to personally get in touch with the pediatric oncologists who knew our story. They were very accommodating to get us right in for an exam and schedule a biopsy there, instead of in the "normal world." So, on September 25, 2012, we arrived at the hospital at a very early time. We'll never forget the look on the oncologist's face as he stood in the doorway of Gavin's room as we returned from the recovery area after his biopsy. Sadly, as alarming as that look was, we prepared ourselves for the worst news.

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Gavin was still quite groggy, so we went into another room where we were told that Gavin had Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. Although we were immediately told that this type of leukemia is more "common" in children than Dylan's Pediatric Follicular Lymphoma, the doctor also told us that because of the way Dylan's body responded to the treatment, there was no way to assure us that Gavin's would be an easier road. We decided that it would be best for everyone if we chose to go to a totally different hospital where medical personnel were not calling Gavin "Dylan," and also so that Gavin was not in the same facility where he saw his brother for the last time.

We left for the new hospital the very next day, and Gavin immediately faced treatments and all of the struggles that go along with that. The first few days were pretty difficult, and Gavin was resistant to all of the new "torture" he was being introduced to, including lumbar punctures, PICC lines, scans and chemo treatments. As frightened as we both were as his parents, we realized that Gavin was feeling absolutely helpless, and he freely recalled all that he had seen his brother go through. As the routine of treatments evolved over the first couple of weeks, it seemed as though things were going "well," although he certainly did feel the effects of his chemo treatments and also struggled with the anticipation of weekly spinal punctures. We were all so very thrilled when we were told that Gavin could go home, and we did everything we were supposed to do in order to prepare for that drive home, and the follow up trips back to the hospital for continued treatments.

We spent one glorious day at home, but as the second evening approached, we knew that the symptoms that we first believed were typical reactions to his most recent chemo was becoming more serious. After checking in with the doctor on call, we ended up at our local ER which led to Gavin being flown back to the hospital by helicopter. After holding his hand during the entire flight, we landed in the early morning hours of October 13, and I had to let go as we were greeted by a medical team ready to treat him. As I watched through the window and saw my younger son struggling in ways that I could not even believe, I was also worried about my husband getting there as well, as he had to drive himself as I flew along in the helicopter.
They finally got Gavin more stable, and Dave also showed up at the hospital. Within the next hour, though, we were told that we would have to step out because Gavin would need to be intubated. All of the things that were happening were so much like what we remembered with Dylan. Worse yet, we knew that Gavin also had vivid memories of what his brother had been through just two years earlier.

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In those first couple of days in the PICU, things were progressing in the same manner as what we watched happen with Dylan. First the ventilator, the next morning dialysis. As time went on, the roller coaster continued to throw us all around in so many directions. We couldn't believe that we were thrown into the nightmare for a second time, and no matter how much we tried to make everything different from the first time, we were reliving a very similar horror, but now more aware of the signs and symptoms that were progressing. How awful to be "experienced," and how much more difficult it was for us to make those impossible decisions along the way, as we knew for certain that there were really no good choices to make.

Just like the first time, we never stopped praying and hoping for a miracle...that one day everything would simply improve and we would all walk out of the hospital and head on home...but that just wasn't the case. We found that Gavin's ordeal was very similar, and realizing that his body was reacting in the same way his brother's had to the chemo. We hated all that was being done to him, and yet, what choice do you have when all you want is to save your child's life?

Thanksgiving Day was awful. Staff convinced us to go over and "enjoy" the holiday dinner at the Ronald McDonald house. On one side of the dining room, all of the families sat, enjoying their dinner "with" their child who was a patient, and on the other side were the two of us...missing our Dylan who was in Heaven, and our Gavin who was across the road in the PICU, hooked up to all kinds of machines that were keeping him alive.

Over the next 5 days, the decline had taken momentum and the moment once again came for us to be told that no more could be done for our son. Once again, we had no other choice but to wait with Gavin, until his heart stopped beating. So after 62 days from his diagnosis, November 27, 2012, there was our second hero...ripped from our world, to join his brother in Heaven. We've learned, the hard way, that pediatric cancer is not rare. It ruins lives. It steals away dreams. Whether children die or survive, there is trauma, heartache, and drastic changes to the life of each family affected. We pray that this disease can be eradicated and that no more families have to become "cancer families."

Written by Gavin's and Dylan's parents, Lora and Dave

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

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