

Internal Strength

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My little girl underwent a battery of tests. This time, a spinal and a bone marrow specimen was taken. They finally found the problem. It was through the bone marrow specimen that they had discovered the culprit. My little girl had cancer. Her little bones were infected with 95% of the cancer cells. It was eating her up inside.

At this point, I'd almost lost everything I knew to be sanity. The doctors rushed us to the hospital and began to explain how difficult it was for them to find this strain of cancer and how it so closely resembled the "common cold".

I was mad as hell! We had been back and forth to those doctors for months. No one had even thought of this. How could this be? The doctor explained, "We never want to think of the worst, right off. If the diagnosis is incorrect, then the child would have gone through some very painful tests unnecessarily."

We were given the chances of her survival, if treatment was not started immediately. And how her chances would be following treatment. Decisions had to be made as to what treatment plan should be taken. This was one that had to be made by the parent because the doctors, in these cases, couldn't make the decisive authorization. I had the doctor to explain the treatments to me and to choose the most expeditious. The treatment which was chosen was one that was relatively new to the United States but had been successfully used in Germany for years. The doctor intimated, to me, that this was the treatment that he would have chosen.

The following Tuesday, we made a call to San Francisco. In San Francisco, the center for deciding which plan to go with was located. It was also the place that came up with the German plan. Later on, I found out that this center has a computer that can be fed information concerning a person's symptoms and it selects the appropriate treatment method. The computer made the same selection for treatment that I had chosen.

It was late Friday evening, by the time we had checked into the hospital. Monday was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday and just about every business was closed. I couldn't contact San Francisco before Tuesday.

For fourteen days, I felt like I was in hell. Day and night, I watched as my little one suffered. She cried because of the pain the cancer caused, from having to be poked and prodded, from being transported from one exam room and, then, to another for spinal taps.

I felt as if my faith was weakening. I just couldn't seem to focus on prayer, anymore. It seemed like my brain was in a vice. I had no direction. Only pain! Sometimes all I could say was, "I need more strength", and I hoped that God was hearing me.

Those first couple-of months, we both went through hell. I ended up with tunnel vision, as far as my little girl was concerned. I didn't...I couldn't do anything but take care of my child and learn all that I could learn about childhood cancers. I took in massive amounts of information. Before she was released from the hospital, I was able to give her her injections and her IV meds. To me, no one else was gentle enough to or concerned enough to rescue my child from all unnecessary pain. The doctors and nurses allowed me to practice with them using saline solution injections.

Following three months, she was back on her feet and showing signs of remission. I, on the other hand, lost all my strength and, what seemed to be, all my faith. I had to surrender myself to the doctors' care. I, now, needed help. The doctors explained to me that I had had a mental collapse when I went into the "tunnel vision" mode and I had directed all my energies to my child. After she was out of immediate danger, I sustained a relapse in the form of "not being focused". The doctors explained how some people can survive extremely stressful situations and then collapse after the danger has passed. That's what I did.

My little one is still in chemo therapy. She is looking and feeling much better. As far as I'm concerned, I've gone full circle with myself, the cancer and how life must go on for all of us.

I've met other parents who have lost their children to cancer and others who are expecting to, in the near and not so near future. I am not planning to place myself in an "expectation" mode that will see me losing my little girl.

My faith has increased and is stronger than ever. My daughter is a fighter. What do I expect? I expect her to grow up and live as normal a life as she possibly can. Maybe-someday, she will even give me grandchildren.

We all have to face our final moments but I won't dwell on mine and neither will I dwell on her's.



At left: Portland Trail Blazer star Buck Williams (right) and former Blazer Maurice Lucas (center) listen as Dr. Jan Bays (left) describes Emanuel Lewis' CARES program. The Blazers are in town to help raise money for hospital programs at a gala on September 15. Tickets are \$125, and Emanuel Lewis hopes to raise \$50,000. For ticket information, call the hospital.

At right: The NBA greets shoot baskets with the pediatrics children, at an outdoor courtyard at the hospital. Before leaving, they signed autographs for the children, and talked with reporters.



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