

Bennett's Story: Childhood Cancer

I played my guitar a lot in the hospital as some form of therapy for myself. Throughout my treatment, I gathered a lot of beads. I was gifted a guitar strap with my beads on it. The guitar strap actually sits where the purple heart sits right above my heart while I play. It's a good memory that I can hold with me.

My name's Bennett. I was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. I was nine when I was diagnosed. My life before I was diagnosed was a lot of soccer, hiking, camping with the family, and snowboarding.

Anything that he could do outdoors, he was usually doing it. We had several early warning signs. Bennett was playing soccer, and he was running on the field with his friends, and he had like this kind of reflux where he was having troubles breathing. We thought it was potentially a reflux, so we gave him reflux medicine. We thought it was allergies. We thought it was

Asthma. Asthma, so we got him one of those breath inhalers. Beth had him run down the street after giving him the breath inhaler, and as he ran down the street, he ran outta air and almost fell over.

And that was the point at which I said, "I think we need to go to urgent care and figure this out." I remember thinking, "This can't be happening." When having to go in and tell Bennett was probably one of the harder things to do, I just remember kind of a look of shock on his face and not understanding what was really happening.

Being in a hospital room at one in the morning with doctors all around you was kinda scary, and I really didn't know much better as a kid, and that was the point where my journey was about to change.

They had to do many, many blood transfusions before I was even able to receive chemo and start treatment. Four days after initially being diagnosed, I was able to start treatment, and then, from there on, we kept going with it.

They began with some heavy doses of chemo, and then he went into what they call remission, where there was still a steady stream of chemo, but it was at a different pace and not as strong.

I had about 23 lumbar punctures and 26 surgeries in total. And that whole process took about three years or so.

We're lucky in that A.L.L. is well documented and treatment through the years has only gotten better and better, but just when Bennett seemed to be passing through one phase and we were getting used to it, we would go to another phase. And so, we were always getting used to it.

None of it was easy, but there was always hope. I had friends on my soccer team that shaved their heads, and we were, you know, bald together, and then we had friends that would bring meals over and write cards. I just realized I had a community around me that was there to support me through what I was going through, which was something really awesome.

And it was really great to connect with other families. You find that when you're in this bubble, as much as you love your friends and you're grateful for them, you need somebody who's gonna understand what you are going through, and so, making those connections and those bonds, both for our kids and ourselves, really helped us not feel alone, helped us not feel isolated.

When you're in that time, you're just in survival mode. You're just moving, you're going, you're doing what you gotta do, and you just gotta hang on to those little things and be watching for 'em, 'cause otherwise, you'll miss 'em.

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The Make-A-Wish coordinators came and asked me what I would like to do, and my initial thought was I wanna go see my favorite soccer player, and I got to, you know, spend our birthdays in Barcelona to meet Leo Messi. That was a really, really, really cool experience.

After treatment was difficult, but in a different way than treatment was. There were some things integrating back into life. What do you tell your friends and how do you go about social situations? And that was a difficult thing to navigate.

Watching Bennett as he goes on and does all of his things, I mean, it's that peace of knowing where you could have been, and knowing the drastic difference. It's been awesome, and exciting, and wonderful.

Looking back, treatment makes you grow up really fast. It makes you mature in different ways and realize different things about life, and that shaped my character and who I am today. While cancer was awful, it is me and it's part of me, and it's part of who I am and the challenges and the trials that I faced during treatment are something that I will take with me for the rest of my life and I'll use to better myself and be a better human being.