

September 15th

Sydni and Simon's Story, written by Sydni, age 17

Life was good. I confidently began my first day of kindergarten, sporting pigtails, a Hello Kitty backpack, and my newest navy-blue kicks. My journey was just beginning. My whole life sat before me.

I spent a typical day learning the ABCs and 123s- until January 4th. On January 4th 2007, I learned a new, never-before-heard phrase: "Your brother has cancer."

I had no clue what cancer was. I knew Simon was sick, I knew he was bald, and I knew he clocked way too many hours in the hospital. I knew we bought hand sanitizer in bulk. I knew that Sam and I were lonely. I knew my journey had hit a fork in the road. Above all else, I knew our journey wasn't over- we were just taking a detour.

When we thought the demon of disorderly dividing cells made a run for it, we were wrong. Twice. Cancer kept striking back and we were striking out.

That's when the bloodwork came back- when *my* bloodwork came back: my bone marrow was Simon's perfect match.

When I heard the big news, I cried (not tears of joy). I was legitimately terrified. Anesthesia, hospital beds, IVs, and more- perhaps a glimpse of what Simon went through each day.

I remember, with intense clarity, February 9th, 2012- a day I often consider the longest of my life.

I was rather reluctant and couldn't find peace in the fact that my hips were about to be drilled into by intimidating grownups I hardly even knew. Eventually I caved, after sobbing to the point where I couldn't cry anymore.

My doctor inquired to my mom as the procedure successfully concluded, "Is she an athlete? She has tough bones!" Yes, I'm an athlete and I might have tough bones, but they're not nearly as tough as all the heroes fighting cancer on the frontlines.

When I woke up, I asked the nurse watching over me for the time. I don't recall her ever answering (and I'm not even sure I was able to get the words out), but I answered for myself: time for this five-year long nightmare to end.

It's haunting; demonizing, devastating. Don't overlook the big picture: cancer comes in multitudes and we must fight to fix that.

I love to explore old memories. Amidst the most strenuous days, it can be difficult to find treasure among a troubled past. But one day I came across my favorite digital image- Simon proudly posing at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. He's aside a bold blue banner- Hope Lives Here.

So don't let fear overcome you; hope lives. The journey doesn't have to end. Take what you're given and don't forget to fight for the best.

I'd especially like to thank all the doctors, nurses, family, and friends who helped my brother be with us still today. You kept a bright light from burning out, and for that I am incredibly thankful.

His cancer has changed my life, and in some ways for the better. I landed a spot in a pancreatic cancer research lab at the University of Pennsylvania for a summer and solidified my dream of becoming a doctor. I became an ambassador for the Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation and have discovered another

side of myself. Above all else, I have been inspired. I've been changed for good and I am ready to change the world for good.

On January 4th, 2007 Simon was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukemia. On February 9th, 2018 he was officially declared cancer free. I can happily say that life *is* good.