

September 22nd: Will's Story, written by Will's mom, Stephanie

On May 15, 2018, we received the news that no parent wants to hear. Our youngest son, 6-year-old William, was diagnosed with Leukemia. Honestly, it was like I had an out of body experience. I remember this doctor sitting in front of me, showing me such compassion, but my mind was running on overdrive. I remember hearing him say that I was probably not going to remember what he was going to say from that point on. He was right. Then I was back and I heard him say "if there is one thing I want you to remember right now, it's this: Do not look at your phone. The internet is a wonderful thing, but it has no filter. We need to find out exactly what type of leukemia we're dealing with." We were then whisked away for x-rays and up to our room on the pediatric floor of the hospital. I was given a journal and the front read "Be Brave." I felt anything but brave in that moment. But there I was staring at my silly 6-year old boy wondering how in the world we were going to tell him he had cancer. The next day he received a port in his chest and soon after, we found out we were dealing with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia.

We are currently 3 months into our journey and it has certainly had its ups and downs. We have faced pneumonia, a gastrointestinal virus, a severe allergic reaction to a form of chemo, and five whole blood transfusions and one platelet transfusion thus far. It really is a constant roller coaster ride. There are moments that absolutely take my breath away and I still can't believe that we have to go through this at all. There are moments that I feel so strong as if we can conquer the world. I find that I struggle the most the days following a release from the hospital. Hospital stays take a lot out of us. The nurses and doctors are amazing, but when we're in the hospital, it's because Will is not healthy enough to be at home. So, while I try to remain as strong as possible in the hospital, I feel exhausted upon leaving, and leaving doesn't mean that Will is "all better." And reality hits.....again.

One of the first things our social worker, Sloane, told me was that "some of the most beautiful moments in life grow from the most terrible experiences." I have to say, that I've already seen so much beauty in this experience. Our oncologists are absolutely amazing. Our nurses, both in the cancer clinic and on the pediatric floor of the hospital are wonderful. I feel like they are becoming an extension of our own family since we see them so much. Our family and friends have really stepped up to help us out as much as possible so that I can continue to work full-time at my dream job that I started one month prior to Will's diagnosis. One of our friends organized a blood drive in July. Another friend created a t-shirt with our Facebook group name, #WillPower, to raise money for pediatric cancer research. We even got to meet THE Will Power, an Indy racecar driver, at Pocono Raceway. Will Power won the Indianapolis 500 within weeks of Will's diagnosis. I didn't even know there was such a person when we created the group name. And for him to win at Indy!!!! Good things are in our future; I just know it.