

The Hills of Life

By: Abby Miles

Life is like a riding a bike. There are hills that are hard to get up, but people will always be there to help you reach the top. Once you make it to the top, it's just a little while until you come to another hill. In the end, it doesn't matter about how steep the hills are, or how bad the pain is. What matters are the people who helped us make it to the top and pushed us to go farther, even when it hurts. This is the story of how I helped my sister ride her bike of life after being diagnosed with cancer and how it changed my life forever.

On October 28 2011, my sister Addison was born. Four months later she was diagnosed with leukemia; a blood cancer. I was about seven years old at this time, and I didn't really understand what this meant. I only thought that she was sick and would be feeling better in about a week. My parents explained to me that we would be spending a lot of time in the hospital and I would go home with one parent while the other stayed with my sister. Every day after school my grandpa would pick me up and take me straight to Kosair Children's Hospital (now Norton Children's Hospital). We would stay there all afternoon until we had to go home for bedtime. There were some days that she was feeling terrible, but most of the time when I got there she would start laughing and light up the room. My goal was to try to help her find a way to bring joy to her life and help her pedal her way up the hill she was facing. I worked hard to remember to play with her everyday, and treat her like any little sister should be treated. I think that this helped her feel normal and not think that she was sick. I can still remember our dance parties and how she would throw her tray on the floor even after my mom velcroed it to the table.

On July 1, just months after diagnosis, she came home from the hospital because she had failed induction treatment (her cancer was not responding to the chemotherapy) so the doctors wanted to do a bone marrow transplant. They did a bone marrow transplant and failed twice. In December, they decided to do a third transplant but with a new donor. At that point her life was coming close to an end. I continued to be there for Addison, but for some reason the hill she was riding up was bigger than Mt. Everest. They did a new transplant the first couple days of January in 2013. She struggled with the third transplant, but she was able to survive it and it worked! She was able to come home a month later and was my littlest best friend. We did everything together!

Then October 2013 arrived and we were told the cancer relapsed. Those prior few months were some of the best months of my life. I enjoyed every moment of it and I never wanted it to end. The doctors tried to treat her and she did not respond. We tried to send her to Philadelphia for a special cancer treatment, but they would not take her because she was too weak to handle it. We brought her back home at the beginning of November after the doctors told us that nothing could be done to save her. We knew she wasn't going to last much longer so we immediately planned her wish trip. A wish trip is when someone is diagnosed with a life threatening disease, like cancer, an organization will sponsor them on a trip someplace or a meet and greet with someone famous; basically whatever the child wants they get. We decided to go to Disney World for a week. We had so much fun and we went to all the parks. Addison's favorite rides were the Teacups and the Merry-Go-Round at Disney World.

While we were in Disney, she stopped taking blood and platelets because her body was no longer accepting them. This caused her to bleed from her brain because of her blood issues. On our last day in the parks, we went to Sea World. She slept for most of the day and she wasn't as cheerful as before. That night she had a seizure where she ultimately passed away. We called 911 and they brought her to the hospital in Orlando. My whole family came to Orlando to keep us all company while it was happening. Dr. Jim Frazier, a family friend, sent the Just for Kids airplane from Kosair to take my sister and parents back to Kentucky so she could die at Kosair with the nurses and doctors that have taken care of her for two years. My parents stayed up for three days straight with no sleep. Addison's hilly bike ride ended on November 21, 2013 in my moms arms with myself and dad right beside her.

Those past two years had a major impact on my life. I learned many lessons and viewed life in a different way. As of this past year, I have decided to take courses in school that put me on the medical path. I want to become a Pediatric Oncologist and help kids like my sister. In the hospital we created amazing relationships with the doctors around us, and I want to be one of them. I want to be the reason many children survive childhood cancer and although I may not save everyone, I want to know I did all I can to help them. Cancer has had a major impact on my life, but I feel like it is all happening for a reason. The biggest lesson I learned is that you never know what people are going through in their own lives, what size hills they are riding up, if they have support along the way, or waiting for them at the top or just simply not at all. I learned that you should always be kind to everyone, even to your enemies as you don't know if they have a sick family member or they have just lost a loved one.