

# Sophie Meinhardt Memorial Scholarship 2013

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OLV

It all started one day in September when I was in the fifth grade. I was going in to the pediatrician for my yearly well check. Although my birthday is in April my well check was pushed back to September. While in the checkup room my doctor felt a lump on the right side of my throat. The doctor didn't think it was anything bad but wanted to send me in to the hospital for an ultrasound just in case. She thought it was just a swollen gland that had moved down or something else.

The Monday after my well-check appointment I went in to the hospital to get my ultrasound. After the ultrasound it took the doctors a long time to come in and talk to my mom. We were sitting in the room with some warm hospital blankets when the doctor, ultrasound tech and a few other people walked in. My mom and I stood up and walked over to the counter to talk with the doctor. I had no idea what they were saying because I was lost in thought looking around the room. But I heard my mom say, the word 'cancer' and I looked up to see tears in her eyes. I immediately asked my mom if I was going to die. She took my face in her hands and said, "No! You are NOT going to die." My mom was trying not to cry and I remember saying to my mom, "Stop crying. Don't cry. It's going to be ok. Please stop."

I know that was the beginning of a spiritual journey with Christ. The radiologist said we were going upstairs to talk to more doctors and my mom hugged me next to her. Then the ultrasound tech took me down to the gift shop and said she would buy me anything under twenty dollars. She didn't have to do this and just was doing this out the kindness in her heart. I picked an eight-dollar white watch and thanked the ultrasound tech. When we met up with my mom we went on a different level of the hospital. My dad had come up to meet us. The E.N.T. took us into a little room and told me he was going to have a look at my neck. He felt it and then a child life specialist took me out of the room so my parents could talk to the doctor. I sat and colored, and then a nurse came in and put some numbing cream on my neck. After a while I was taken back into the room with the E.N.T., my parents and some other doctors. On the table I saw a tray with two very very large needles on it. The E.N.T. told me it was a biopsy to check and see if I had cancer or not. I held my mom's hand. He made conversation with me while the needle was in, asking me if I had any pets and asking me about them. I told him I had a dog and his name was Gizmo, he was a Shih Tzu and we had only had him for a few months. The needle had to stay in for a little while but it finally came out. They put a bandage on it and told me to go with the child life specialist. When my parents came out to get me we left the hospital. My nana was at my house, it was my sister's birthday too. I felt bad, thinking that I ruined her birthday. We had pizza that night and I was still feeling bad because that wasn't much of a birthday dinner.

We had to wait a few days for the biopsy results. My family always prays each day, but now was a time when my mom asked others to pray with us. She sent emails and made phone calls asking friends and family to pray. The biopsy results came back 'inconclusive', and I went to another visit with the E.N.T. where he said we needed to do surgery as soon as possible to take out glands and possibly my thyroid if they found that it was cancer. He put a little tube camera down my nose so he could see my vocal cords so he would know how they looked before surgery and to make sure he wouldn't damage them in surgery. I got my blood drawn, which I hate, and we left with the news that my surgery would be in a week. My family and friends supported me praying and sending me gift baskets, cards, cookies, and flowers. I was overwhelmed with their love. Faith was strengthening me to push on, keep going.

The Friday before my surgery I went to my friends because I thought I was going to help her babysit, but I was actually surprised with a party. My friends and a few neighbors were there and there was a big sign that said, "We are here for you, Madelyn. That's what friends are for." We had so much fun. The best part of the night was the prayer blanket that my friends made. Each girl tied a knot on the side of the blanket and said a prayer while tying it together. I am so blessed to have friends like them. It is truly unbelievable how God works through people.

The Wednesday after that, the day of my surgery, my sisters and brothers were with neighbors and family. My mom, dad and I went to the hospital. When we checked in my waiting number was eight. We waited and I finally got called back to get weighed and measured. I put the hospital gown on and hopped on to a bed in a little room. A nurse talked to us about what was going to happen. Then I was taken into the surgery room to get anesthesia and to start the surgery. My parents couldn't be with me so we held hands together and prayed before I hugged them goodbye and went into room number eight my surgery room. After the three-hour surgery I woke up in the recovery room. I don't remember much only that I asked the nurse near me where my mom was. She said that my family would be in soon. I closed my eyes, still tired from the surgery. I was in pain but I guess I didn't care because my mom walked in along with my dad, my grandma and grandpa, and my nana and papa. I was so happy to see them. I asked my mom if it was cancer and she said yes, but everything is going to be fine! That's all I can remember until I ended up in my room I would be staying in for the next few days. My room number was seventeen. One plus seven is eight. My waiting number was eight, my pre-surgery room was number eight and my operating room was number eight. It was a sign from God that everything was going to be alright and it turned out to be. I had a lot of gauze on my neck and some rap that kept it around my neck. I spent three days at the hospital attached to cords and IV's. I also had a tube in my neck that measured my drainage from my neck. Whenever I peed it would get measured to make sure I was peeing enough. Every hour a nurse came in to take my blood and make sure I was doing ok. I was sent up cookies flowers balloons and stuffed animals to make me feel better. To lift my spirits my mom and I did some mad libs but every time I laughed I felt a lasting pain in my neck. Overall, my time at the hospital wasn't so bad. Especially when I met some of the other children in my hall and I realized the huge battles they were fighting. Some of them had to spend many weeks in the hospital and have multiple surgeries.

When I got home my dog was so excited to see me. My dog was literally spazzing out. He was showing me love. I have been told that animals can't feel love, but I believe they can. I have also been told the animals don't have souls. But I believe they do. I have been told that because animals don't have souls, they don't go to Heaven. But I believe they do. I believe God puts them on this earth to show us unconditional love, like God has for us.

A few months later I had scans and treatment. After the treatment more scans and then and there I was confirmed a cancer survivor. Clean scans! I kicked cancer's butt. But I couldn't have done it without my faith. PRAY HOPE BELIEVE is my motto just like it was Tony Merk's motto. The Merk family prayed on the eights of every hour and my mom prayed asking for a sign before my surgery. I think of it as God's sign of the eights. Sometimes in your life God truly reveals himself to you in many ways. This was very obvious to me during my time with cancer. I had family and friends, but most of all I had God. What do people do if they don't have God? This experience has made my life different than it has ever been. I want to make a change. I want to spread God's love. I know now what God has called me for and that is to help people through their tough times like others helped me. Be supportive and prayerful, like my family, friends and even strangers were to me. I don't personally know many children that have or had cancer. But I have, and I feel so blessed to have been healed. I know I can overcome anything now that I have overcome this.

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Philippians 4:13