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CHAPTER 1

Lexie, age 15

## TEENS TAKING OUT CANCER

By: Lexie

### Devastating Diagnosis

Devastating, horrifying, and heart-breaking are some of the most common words associated with the word cancer. Although being diagnosed with cancer is a hard thing to deal with and understand, it doesn't have to be that bad especially if you have a good attitude about it. That is what I am here for; to share my personal experience and to answer the many frequently asked questions. Hopefully, this will give teens a better understanding of how this whole "cancer" things works.

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**Q.)** What was it like to be diagnosed?

**A.)** Being diagnosed was hard, all my friends and family were crushed. Unfortunately, I have been diagnosed 5 times so for me, after a while, the words "you have cancer" didn't really faze me.

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**Q.)** How did you feel when you were diagnosed?

**A.)** Like I said before, hearing that I had cancer didn't really faze me. Generally, I have a pretty upbeat attitude about things. Of course I was sad, but I knew sort of what was going to

happen; I faced the facts and moved on.

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**Q.)** How did you tell your friends about your diagnosis?

**A.)** Telling my friends was always a challenge. It was hard explaining that I wouldn't be able to go out or join in on parties, that I would be sick and tired most of the time, that they wouldn't see me at school very much. Lucky for me, all of my friends really understood; they tried to comfort me and told me no matter what we would still be friends.

### Stupid Symptoms

Everyone's symptoms vary depending on medication and treatment plans. Some symptoms can be as little as headaches, stomach aches, soreness and fatigue. More serious stuff could be skin rashes and other skin issues, organ issues bone thinning and all kinds of other stuff, but don't let that worry you everyone is different just be prepared for what could happen.

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**Q.)** What is cancer?

**A.)** Cancer can be represented in many ways. Sarcomas and Lymphomas are two common types of cancers. Within those two categories there are tons of different types of cancer, some are tumors, some are skin, some are organ or they could be like

mine, blood cancer.

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**Q.)** What does cancer look like?

**A.)** Cancer can be seen many different ways. Pale skin, skinny faces, bumps or rashes, bald heads, handi-cap, even amputees. Nevertheless, we are still people and that is how we should be treated.

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**Q.)** What do you like or not like about your cancer?

**A.)** Well, there are many things I like and don't like about having cancer, One thing I like is all the great people I've befriended and experiences I've gotten to see, but there are many things I have had to miss out on due to appointments or just not feeling well.

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## **A Home at the Hospital**

You will find that the hospital becomes your second home and the staff your second family. It is pretty easy to assume that you will be in and out of the hospital a lot. Medicine does funny things to your body and sometime they bring you in for a fever or other things. If you plan for the stay and bring things to keep you busy, the stays are really not that bad.

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**Q.)** What do you like about being in the hospital/ what don't

you like?

**A.)** I probably speak for most of the patients when I say the best part about being in the hospital is the 24/7 attention and care and upbeat nurses. What isn't the best is the below average food, the IV pumps constantly going off and the late night interruptions.

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**Q.)** What do you do when you are in the hospital?

**A.)** I try to do as much as I can while I feel good, but because the medicines made me feel tired and icky and the pumps kept me up all night I didn't really feel up to doing a whole lot. I am not sure about other hospitals, but U of M offers art therapy, music therapy, a wonderful child-life program that can assist you with crafts, games or just someone to hang out with; also they have pizza and live entertainment on Thursday night for the people who are in-patient.

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### **Tricky Treatments and Tips to Getting Through**

Depending on what type of cancer or where it is in your body, treatment plans can vary greatly. In my personal experience I've had a variety of different treatments. I've had radiation, many different types of chemo therapy, and a bone marrow transplant and now we are starting a new therapy called Immunotherapy. It's pretty safe to say that I have seen almost

all of it. During my long life of cancer I have learned the tricks and trades of making it through. There are some really simple things that you can do to make a crappy day a little better. (Look in the back for some fun tips and tricks)

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**Q.)** What are some things you like about being treated/ what are some things you don't like?

**A.)** Well, I can't say that there is a whole lot of things I like about being treated other than the fact that it is keeping my cancer at bay. Certainly, I can tell you a lot of things I don't like. One thing I don't like is how chemo and other treatments make me feel. Sometimes they make me feel icky and tired almost all the time. The one thing I hate the most though is the time spent away from friends. You may find yourself alone at times because your friends don't ask you to hang out. My advice, don't get mad at them or blame them for not hanging out with you because that could stir up a lot of problems. Most of the time they don't know how to react, chances are they really want to be your friend still.

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**Q.)** How did you/ do you keep your spirits up during treatment?

**A.)** This question is my most frequently asked question; it's like everyone wants to know my secret or something. Here is the thing, cancer sucks and we all know it so instead of wasting

the little energy I have left pouting and throwing myself a pity party, why not smile and try to enjoy life a little. I find that if I keep a more positive attitude my appointments go faster, treatments feel better and in general people want to be around me more.

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## A Teens Advice

Throughout my journey with cancer I have experienced a lot. There were many things I wish I never knew about, but there have been many experiences that I am very grateful I have been able to take part in. If I could give anyone advice the biggest piece of advice I can give is to have a good attitude and try to live life to the best of your ability because later on you will regret all the opportunities you passed up.

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**Q.)** What advice would you give to a teen that has just been diagnosed?

**A.)** My advice to any teen that has just been diagnosed is to live life like nothing is going on. Don't pass opportunities up because you don't think you can do something or are too embarrassed. Nothing about cancer is positive, but you can make the best out of the situation. For a long time I didn't want to swim in front of my friends because I couldn't wear a wig in



the pool. Just recently I was at a friend's birthday party and it was a bowling party but I had a fractured foot so I didn't think I could play. My friends were so supportive; they even helped me bowl so I could join in on the fun! I would have never known how much fun either of these things would have been if I had let silly little embarrassments get in my way. Another piece of advice is to speak up. If you don't like something or something doesn't feel right you need to say something. It is so important for you to voice your opinion because the doctors and nurses can sometimes fix things to make them more comfortable, and remember they are human too they could have made a mistake.

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**Q.)** What kind of things do you want adults in your life to know about what it's like to have cancer?

**A.)** I assumed they meant adults in general when they asked this question. I want them all to know that we are just normal kids; we don't need to be talked to differently, looked at funny, asked embarrassing questions and monitored like prey every minute. This goes for family, friends, people in public and doctors.

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### Remember and Reflect

When reflecting back on my journey only one question is asked that's really important. It's basically two questions in one but it

has such a huge impact.

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**Q.)** Has cancer changed your life and would you change it all if you could?

**A.)** I am not sure I would change everything. Cancer has been a part of my life for so long, it has made me who I am and allowed me to see things in a whole different way. If I were to change anything about my cancer it would be the amount of relapses. One time through is more than anyone should have to deal with, 5 times is not something I have enjoyed.

Cancer has made me realize that life isn't easy, but you have to have faith, trust and courage; with these three things, you can accomplish anything! The journey, as awful as it is has shown me to go for my dreams and work extra hard because I have been given the gift of life and I can't waist something so precious. Currently, I have my own non-profit organization that aids sick children and children in poverty. I am an honors student and I have a job working with young children, Yes, I still take chemo, but I try really hard to run as normal of a life as possible.

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## A Few Facts about Me!

Now that we have gotten through all the questions and stuff I am sure you are curious as to who wrote this. Well, my name is Lexie and I am an only child. I live at home with two dogs and cat, which I love very much. Some of my favorite hobbies are crafting, swimming, writing, spending time with friends and watching movies. A few of my favorite TV shows are Criminal Minds, Full House, George Lopez, cooking competitions and the Style Network. Normally, I am a pretty busy person; I have tutored for elementary age reading, I work at a pre-school and I run a non-profit organization. When I am not busy with any of that I try to spend time with family and friends.

Now that you have gotten to know a little bit about me and have read my experiences and thoughts, I hope that your questions and worries have been clarified. Hopefully, you enjoyed my story and are inspired to get out and live life, work for your dreams and get out of your comfort zone.

Thanks for reading!

Lexie

## IDEAS, TIPS AND TRICKS!

### Easy hospital food treats

#### Creamsicles in a cup:

- . 1 single serving of orange sherbet (raspberry works well too)
- . 1 single serving of vanilla ice cream
  - Scoop both into cup and mix until soft, then ENJOY!

#### Sunday breakfast scramble (close enough)

- .Order of scrambled eggs
- .Order of link sausage or hot dog
- .1 slice of cheese (your preference)
  - Slice sausage and mix in with eggs. Place cheese on top and microwave for 30 seconds.
  - Enjoy!

### Crafts and other fun ideas!

- . Practice your skills by solving crossword puzzles and other mind games
- . Start a blog or write in a journal
- . Build a model car or paint a pot
- . Knit a scarf

- . Make make-up, hair or nail tutorials
- . Create fan pages or interest pages on Facebook
- . Write a song or poem

**Fun, safe websites for all age's not just teens!**

- <http://www.imvu.com> (recommended for teens only)
- <http://www.howrse.com>
- <http://www.stardoll.com/en>
- <http://www.edheads.org>
- [www.coolmath-games.com](http://www.coolmath-games.com)
- <http://pbskids.org/games/>
- <http://disneychannel.disney.com/games>
- [http://www.barbie.com/activities/fun\\_games/#/whats-hot](http://www.barbie.com/activities/fun_games/#/whats-hot)
- <http://www.miniclip.com/games/en>

