



Hello, my name is Dusty. I have a wonderful family that I love with all my heart and soul. My husband Bill and I have been married for 13 years. We have 3 beautiful daughters, Alexandria is 17 and the twins, Joelle & Jocelyn are 12. We are your everyday American family. We have 2 dogs, Luna & Charweewee. 2 cats, Raja & Lucky and 2 birds, Melody & Kupa. We go to work every day. Our kids go to school and are in and out of different sports and organizations. We love spending time with our families and going camping. See, normal. Well, there is this one thing...On September 30, 2013, our daughter Joelle was diagnosed with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia. Goodbye "Normal Life" and hello "Cancer Life".

Joelle was 10 years old when she was diagnosed. She had just started 5th grade, her final year in elementary school and was looking forward to all the exciting things that came with being a "5th Grader".

Over the course of a week, Joelle became more and more pale. She had been complaining of a tummy ache and she was always tired. At first I thought " Oh great! School has just started and one of them is already getting sick!" I thought maybe she was coming down with the flu, but she wasn't throwing up and she wasn't running a fever. Then as she kept losing color I started to think maybe she was anemic. I called the doctor on Monday morning and they were so concerned with her symptoms that they told me to take her straight to the ER. Here I am thinking, "What? Are you kidding me? She's anemic, just send her for blood work! Great! Now I'm gonna have \$100 ER bill."

It was just a few hours later that the ER doctor ripped the floor right out from under my feet and told me that my baby had Leukemia and that she needed to be transported to Syracuse in an ambulance ASAP. I literally couldn't breath. At one point I had sat down on the floor right there in the nurses station. The room was spinning and I just wanted to run and grab my baby and hold her. But I couldn't move. I couldn't breath. I couldn't speak. And then it hit me like a slap to the face! She was the one who was sick! She was so very sick and I had to get up and get it together! I had to make phone calls, oh crap, my phone was almost dead. A very kind nurse heard me curse and brought me her charger. I got up, I called Bill, my dad & my mom. I cried as I told them the most

horrific news I have ever had to give and what I needed from them. Alex & Jocelyn were home from school at this point and I couldn't get to them and I didn't know when I would be back home. Oh god, I was I going to tell them?! I stopped my thoughts there, I took a few deep breaths and I went back to my baby and I forced myself to smile and tell her everything was going to be alright but that we had to go to another hospital.

For those of you who don't know, Leukemia has the highest success rate in children's cancer. About 80% of children diagnosed with A.L.L. survive. Did you know that some say if your child is diagnosed with A.L.L. you are lucky? We heard it all! And though everyone was coming from a good place, there is no luck when it comes to your child being diagnosed with cancer! We watched our baby cry and beg us not to let them access her port or put her to sleep for countless spinals. We fought to get her to learn to swallow her pills every night and we still listen while we rub her back as she still gags every single time she takes them. We watched her wither down to 65 lbs till she looked like skin and bones. We cut and then shaved her hair because her hair falling out was too hard to witness. We have no carpets, or area rugs in our house because her sudden vomiting episodes ruined them. NO! There is no luck in having your child be diagnosed with Leukemia. Could it be worse? Yes! Her body could not have responded so well and the cancer could have and could still, come back. It is the reality of our lives, forever.

We are just a little over a month away from Joelle hitting 2 years in remission! She is still going once a month for treatment at Golisano Children's Hospital in Syracuse and is scheduled to finish treatment in just 4 months, January of 2016! I thank God each and every day that Joelle has responded so well to her treatments!

Today Joelle starts 7th grade. She is a happy and for the most part a healthy 12 yr old girl. Last year she started "Give a gift from the heart" drive and hopes to do it again this year. She asked all her classmates and teachers to donate a new book for the book closet at Golisano and they collected and donated 380 books to the children who receive treatment at Golisano. She also hopes to help get her school to "Go Gold" in September and all donations will go to Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation. She wants to help our cousin Sarah raise money to find a cure in memory of her son, Austin, who died from brain cancer at age 4.

There are so many organizations out there all fighting for the same thing. To raise awareness, to fund a cure and to help families build happy memories during this dark time in their lives. Amazing Gracie's Gift Foundation has done exactly that for our family. They've helped by giving us a monetary donation that allowed us to purchase pellets for our home in the winter time and travel expenses back and forth to Golisano. They gave us a Family Photo Shoot that brought some much needed light into our lives. I will forever have the memories of that day hanging on my wall. They have countless fundraisers and work tirelessly to give to others during the hardest days of their lives. My family and I will forever be grateful for what they have done for us and for others. My husband is in the process of trying to get the company he works for, Con-way Freight, to GO GOLD and all the proceeds will go directly to Amazing Gracie's Gift Foundation. We truly hope to help keep this foundation up and running and supporting families for years to come!