



She pushed through her treatment, determined to beat cancer and anything that came along with it.

Ariana Ruskey-Moffett



Ariana has always been an active and precocious child with a dynamic personality. A stranger once commented, "It is hard to imagine that she won't be a movie star!" Not that the glamour of Hollywood would exactly fit the personality of a child who loves karate, barrel racing, and archery and who regards solving math problems as a special after school treat. Ariana is definitely cut from her own mold.

On New Year's Day 2006, after spending the Christmas holiday with family in Colorado, Ariana headed home to Laramie. During the drive, Ariana began to complain of lower back pain. Her parents had heard similar complaints before but could never locate the source of the problem. This time, when the pain did not subside, they began to worry. An x-ray a few days later indicated the presence of a small amount of hardened tissue around her spine. The images were not conclusive and Ariana's parents remained optimistic that they were dealing with a minor injury. By the time Ariana's MRI appointment rolled around nine days later, her pain had become excruciating. Her parents felt helpless, unable to alleviate their daughter's pain. Days later, their worst fear would be realized.

Ariana had cancer. She was diagnosed with Ewing's Sarcoma, an extremely rare and aggressive form of childhood cancer. A tumor was embedded in Ariana's spinal column, growing outward into the surrounding tissues. The pressure on her spinal cord was so great, it was a miracle that she could still walk.

The next ten days were a blur. Ariana had a series of surgeries, one to remove the tumor on her spine and another to remove a small metastatic lesion on her left lung. She also had a port installed in her chest to deliver chemotherapy medication, a visit to the dentist to seal her teeth to prevent bacteria from harming her immune suppressed body, and a battery of scans of every conceivable sort.

Because of the location of Ariana's tumor, only one treatment option was available— a twelve-month course of chemotherapy and a six-week treatment of radiation to the affected areas of the spine and both lungs. With only a 50 percent chance of survival, Ariana had no time to waste.

After completing chemotherapy, Ariana still had to endure a high-dose steroid treatment to battle radiation damage to her lungs. The steroids caused her weight to skyrocket from 72 pounds to 114 pounds within weeks!

Bald, bloated and carrying around an oxygen tank, Ariana was not her vivacious movie star self. She began to feel like an outsider but she was not a quitter. She pushed through her treatment, determined to beat cancer and anything that came along with it.

Today, Ariana's back pain, portable oxygen tank and weight gain are things of the past. She recently earned her orange belt in karate and won two events during the Jubilee Days horse show. Give Ariana an obstacle, no matter how big, and she will just jump right over it.

She is a champion.

