

# My Journey

*Macen Kroll*

As I sit here looking down at a picture taken at Camp Ukandu, remembering all the memories, love and sadness I have experienced at this camp. We are huddled in a big group, we hug, hands on each others' backs holding each other close, wishing we did not have to leave such an amazing camp family like camp Ukandu. This camp is where everyone can be themselves no matter if you have lost limbs, are still in treatment, or have survived your battle. This camp offers kids going through treatment or the loss of limbs a chance to go horseback riding, zip lining, rock climbing, and participate in a ropes course, for these kids that cannot do these things at the hospital.

To attend camp Ukandu, a person must have been diagnosed with cancer themselves or have siblings that had cancer. When me and my family found out I had cancer, I was way too young to be able to attend camp. When I was about thirteen, my best friend's older brother got diagnosed with cancer. The doctors told his family about this amazing camp. Sadly, he did not want to go, but his sister did. When she got back, she told me about all the awesome things she got to do and the amazing friendships she made. As a result, I signed up the following year and got accepted. I was very nervous about going because I did not know if I was going to make friends or have fun away from my family for a week. When I got there, everyone was so nice and welcoming, and I met my group leaders and visited my cabin called the Tree Tops. My group leader had me sit down on the wooden table outside and told me I needed to come up with a name to put on my name tag. I sat and thought of a bunch of different things, then I came up with my camp name, Noodle. These names give the kids a chance to go by whatever identity they want instead of being known as the kid with cancer or the kid with amputated limbs.

I made so many friends from camp that I still keep in contact with and hangout with outside of camp. Obviously, some of my close friends I made during the years attending camp have lost their brutal fight to cancer. The first friend I lost went by Pretzel. I was sitting in bed playing on my phone and saw this video on Facebook of Pretzel, so I clicked on it and watched the video. This video was talking about how amazing he was and how he had fought hard for so long, and unfortunately he passed away. I was so shocked because I had texted him a week before that and he made it seem like everything was okay. The part of his passing away that still gets to me is the day before he passed, I was at the same hospital for my survival clinic. Many thoughts ran through my head: Could I have been able to say goodbye? He was there and I didn't even know it. My second friend I lost went by the name Big Hawk. I remember getting a phone call from a camp member named Beast asking if I knew about Big Hawk. I was very confused and asked: What's wrong? The two words Beast said next made my world pause, I had lost another friend to cancer. My third friend passed away last year; he went by the name Potato. Late one night, I got

a text from his girlfriend. She began to tell me that he had passed away that morning. Alone in my bed, I began to cry wondering how she knew to text me and how she even knew who I was. After asking how it happened and how she knew to contact me, she began to tell me that before he passed she had asked him why he had a playing card with the name Noodle on it in his phone case. He told her that it was someone he cared very much about and that she meant a lot to him. Laying there crying reading those texts in the dark of my room made me more sad. That year at camp I had split a playing card in half and wrote my camp name on one half and wrote his on the other. We swapped halves and told each other we would save them forever and reconnect them the next year at camp. In the moment, I did not think he would really keep it after all that time, but he did. With all the friends I have lost, it makes me not want to sign up this year for camp, because I know I am going to make new friends and may eventually lose them.

When I was two years old my parents started to notice a bunch of bruises on my body. For example, if they picked me up, their hands would leave bruises. I always wanted to be held and was always tired. My mom thought that maybe I was just a tired baby that just never wanted to be put down. The day before my parents took me to the hospital, my family and I went to Wild Waves theme park. My mom told me that I did not want to play in the water and that all I did was sleep in her or my dad's arms. The next day my mom and dad were discussing bringing me to the doctors. They did not want the doctors to see all my bruises and think they were abusing me. She took me anyways. When we got there, the doctors took a sample of my blood for testing. The doctor came back in the room we were in and told my mom that an ambulance is on its way and that I would be taken to Dormbeckers Child Hospital. My mom was in shock and bewildered began to ask questions. Then the doctor told my mom something that would forever change mine and my family's life: I had got diagnosed on September 3, 2002 with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (A.L.L). This cancer is a type of cancer in which the bone marrow makes too many immature lymphocytes (a type of white blood cell). Leukemia may affect red blood cells, white blood cells, and platelets. In my case it affected my white blood cells, and platelets. I relapsed when I was five years old and had only a 50% chance of living. On September 9, 2005 I got my bone marrow transplant from a guy named Tim Brewer. Tim did not know who I was other than I was a little girl who would die without him. Tim traveled from Texas to Washington so I could to meet him. I was so nervous to meet the man who gave me a second chance at life; I will never forget that day.

The doctors told my parents that I would not be able to do things in life that normal kids could do. They told my parents that I would only make it to the fifth grade. They suggested that after fifth grade school would start getting harder for me and recommended my parents home school me. My parents decided to keep me in school and although I still have check ups. I am now eighteen years old. I participate in school sports like soccer, cheer, softball and other school activities. I am almost a straight 'A' student. I will be graduating in June with my class. I got accepted into Central Washington University where I will be studying to become a kindergarten teacher.

With all that I have gone through, I try to live everyday of life to the fullest, not only for me, but also for my donor who gave me a second chance at life. I live each day to the fullest for my parents who spent so much time shaping me to be the person I am today and also for the doctors that spent so much time on a girl they did not even know who should not have survived cancer but did. I live each day for my teachers and friends that have helped me get through my worst days. I love and appreciate everyone in my life because I would not be here today if it were not for them.