



ONE CHILD'S AND FAMILY'S BATTLE WITH LEUKEMIA

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Leukemia is a type of cancer that affects the blood and bone marrow, characterized by the excess production of abnormal white blood cells. This uncontrolled growth can suppress the production of normal blood cells, leading to symptoms such as fatigue, frequent infections, and easy bruising. There are several types of leukemia, which can be classified based on the speed of progression (acute or chronic) and the type of blood cell involved (lymphoid or myeloid). Treatment options vary and may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and stem cell transplants. For more detailed information, you can refer to sources like the Mayo Clinic and the National Cancer Institute.

This is what the Friedman family began facing about a year ago. Their oldest child Bryce, who is an active child, began being abnormally tired and when they were at a Thai Temple, he fainted. This prompted them to get tests done and that is when they discovered he had Leukemia. The following is the story of Bryce's journey with his family through this trying time.

I was first introduced to Bryce and his family at the 2026 Penguin Plunge on March 1, 2026. His family was one that was chosen as a recipient of donations to help take care of medical costs associated with his illness. His father Neil sang the National Anthem before the participants ran into the freezing cold water of the Hudson River.

We met at Norcina Restaurant in New City with Neil and Bryce Friedman, recipients of donations from the Penguin Plunge, which took place on March 1st. Tell me a little bit about Bryce's situation as to why you ended up involved with the penguin plunge.

Neil began the explanation of the situation. "All right, so in April of 2025, Bryce was diagnosed with leukemia.

He was getting ready for 5th grade graduation when we found out, and we spent almost a month in the hospital in the beginning. Since then, there have been a lot of medical costs as well. We got in touch with some people that introduced us to the Penguin Plunge. They met us and spoke to us on the phone and decided that we would be a family that they would help."

Bryce was sitting there looking at his dad, so I asked him how he was feeling. "I'm feeling pretty good. I'm feeling way better than like a year ago. It's really hard, but I think I'm getting through it now. Getting used to it.

What happened that you ended up going and getting him checked out to find out, he, he had leukemia? Was he having any symptoms? Neil looked at Bryce and told him he could talk about it.

<https://youtu.be/6y4omccbYZM>

Now they had to face this so, what were the next steps?

Neil responded, "It was like slow at first because of the shock because this is a pretty big thing, you know. We first had to get used to it and then all of like the surgeries came out one at a time."

How did they react to it? Bryce seemed like a pretty active kid and then all of a sudden it's like crash and burn here. He says he reacted pretty good. There were sometimes that, he was deep in thought thinking about. He would ask why would this happen to me and not to like another person, but then I got over it and then he thinks he handled it pretty well.

Neil says that's, that's the biggest understatement in history. "From the moment we found out at Sloan about his diagnosis of leukemia, from the start he wanted to know everything. He handled it not like a, a 10-year-old. He's 11 now, but he was 10 at the time. He didn't handle it like a, a 10-year-old. He knew right away what his goals were. He wasn't afraid of the diagnosis. We knew that we were going to be spending almost a month in the hospital. He had no problem with that, including living with another kid and another parent that was dealing with something similar. He faced it with courage from the start, and it gave the rest of us in the family the courage to just not give in to our fear and just to face the problem."

Well, speaking about fears, what was your biggest fear when you found out about this?

"I didn't have a lot of fears at the time but mostly like what I worried about was like pain and if I, when I'd get better. I really, I just wanted to get back to my friends at school before graduation." Which he unfortunately didn't make. "There was a lot of procedures and medicine I had to take. So unfortunately, I couldn't graduate for 5th grade." Bryce said.

When dealing with cancers, the medicines could have adverse effects like nausea. Did Bryce suffer from this or any other effects?

"Yeah, most of them made me nauseous, but there was a lot of anti-nausea medicines that helped that out too."

Was it radiation, chemo?

"Fortunately, he did not have to have radiation for his type of leukemia. A lot of chemo, plenty of types of chemo. One thing until you're dealing with this yourself, you don't realize is, some of the chemo he needs to be at the hospital for at Memorial Sloan Kettering in New York City, some of the chemo he could take at home in pill form or even in injection form. So, my wife and I had to learn how to give and inject chemo to him during certain stages, but those were short periods of time, when we were in those phases. So yeah, lots of medicines and, he did succumb to some side effects, but there were no major complications during his first 15 months of procedures.

What side effects did you have?

"Yeah, so like, the side effects were, It's like sometimes we have a procedure when they had to like take spinal fluid from my back. I would be in a lot of pain for a couple of days and then I'll have some headaches. But that doesn't happen too much. But with the chemo, I would be really tired, and I couldn't be able to do anything. But with the help of my mom's food that she would send over occasionally, I got better, faster than most of the other kids.

It must be tough having to sit there and play video games all day cause you can't do anything else. Bryce smiled and laughed, "A little bit. It wasn't like a lot else to do."

The one thing about things like this is there are always next steps. What are the next steps?

"At this point, we are past the 4 first phases of our type of leukemia treatment. We're in phase 5. Bryce does not go to Sloan as frequently. He goes once a month for treatment, and he doesn't have to stay over. Although we always have a go bag ready in the car, we haven't had to use it. Earlier during treatment, we've had two times where we were hospitalized and had to take an ambulance. For the most part, we don't have to worry about those situations anymore. He'll go to get treatment once a month at Sloan in New York City. Then for the week after that, he'll be on steroids and other medications, and he won't really be able to go out much, but for 3 weeks out of the month, he could do whatever he wants.

During those three weeks he's been going to camp, and he's been feeling a lot better. He has the energy to do basically whatever he wants if his parents let him do it.

<https://youtu.be/s3UQYF9stRQ>

How have your friends dealt with this?

"Well, I wasn't really seeing my friends a lot, but sometimes, in like phase one, they would like visit me like once or twice. We've been doing like these sleepovers called swap over. The littles go to one house, and the big brothers go to another house."

Get rid of the younger siblings so they don't, they don't screw up the fun.

"We split up the parents and the kids, because Bryce has sensitivity to dogs. We couldn't go to their house together, so we found a way to do these swap over and had a lot of fun, and this was even during some of the stages where Bryce was going through a lot of trauma, so he would look forward to these swap overs, with the Termini family every month or so, and we would do a swap over with the Terminis and then we noticed that would kind of recharge him for the month." Neil explained.

One thing about having a disease is it can cause depression. Did you ever feel depressed about this?

"Sometimes when I realize it's gonna be like a long road to it. 2 or 3 years until I get better. Yeah, I sometimes feel depressed, but not all the time." Bryce said.

How's his immune system been with all of this? Is he more susceptible to colds and other ailments?

"It really depends on the numbers and the types of treatments he's getting. Immunity could go up or down depending on that. Right now, we're at a point where his immunity is strong, and that gives us a chance to do, to do more. That first year there were times when his immunity wouldn't be as strong and we were more homebound, but we still managed to find some, some things to do, especially once these organizations that have been helping us out, helped us out, we were able to do stuff in the home to get ready for those events and, you know. We deal with it the best we could and then when his immunity would get stronger, get outside again."

Did you have to really sterilize the place, really make sure it was clean, dust-free, you know, I mean completely, almost hyper allergenic for him?

"When I first got back home from like a month in the hospital. Yeah, we had to like focus on cleaning up the house a bit like more than you were used to because like I'm more susceptible. I was more susceptible to fevers and all that bad stuff that would make normal people would stay at home and to maybe recover. If I had a fever or something worse, I would have to go to the hospital, and no one wants that. Yeah, the hospital is not a fun place.

The Penguin Plunge is another charitable organization like the Polar Plunge that helps families facing mounting medical bills due to major illnesses.

<https://youtu.be/zURCFVeYSIY>

What do you do to keep your spirits up, to keep you focused away from the leukemia.

"Well, there was a lot of things I do. I like Lego, so it helps me focus and really keeps my mind off how everything is going down. I like to play video games, and I've been into golf lately. I like to like have a lot of fun with my friends."

Neil stated that the Norcina golf outing, will be Bryce's first time on a real golf course. So, we'll get to see if, if unlike us, he gravitates toward it.



Let's talk about that. How did that come about?

"One of the owners, I grew up with one of the owners, Nouch, everyone calls him, his name is Nick, and a friend of our other son's mom, Recommended that we be a family in consideration. Since I grew up with one of the owners, Nick, he thought, let's talk to Bryce. I brought Bryce and Kobe with me here to meet him and the owner, and the other two owners are Tommy and Milan. We met with Tommy, Milan, and Nick and introduced each other and the boys had a really good rapport with them, so we thought, let's go ahead and do this. We were chosen as the recipient family and then from there it was, it was about getting ready for the, for the event and spreading the word." Neil said.

This is another fundraiser for the, for the family.



Yes, this is another fundraiser. This is separate than the Penguin Plunge. This is the Norcina Charity golf outing. They do an annual event. The restaurant that we're in is called Norcina, and they're in New City, and they do an annual event which is golf in the morning and then back at the restaurant at night with raffles, prizes, and more fun. Bryce will get to be the, the guest of honor that day, and there'll be golf in the morning and food all day and just a time to celebrate and Norcina does this once a year and wants to give back to the community and since I grew up with one of the owners and live really close by nearby, we feel really extra special, and lucky to be part of this fundraiser on July twenty-seventh.