

## KRISTINA

By Ashley Kopf  
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It was a dreary day and my Dad was driving me home to my mom's. I spent the weekends with my Dad since my parent's divorce. I had grown accustomed to the fact that I would visit him separately, maybe because they divorced when I was so young.

Suddenly my dad turned to me and said, "Ashley, your cousin Kristina has been diagnosed with cancer." The words threw daggers at my heart.

"What?" I gasped. I knew what cancer could do to a person because I remembered what had happened to my Granny. She died from it.

Shortly after my dad told me about Kristina, she started going to the hospital often. Sometimes when I went to visit her, I would have to wear a mask so that I wouldn't bring in any of my germs. Although she seemed uncomfortably pale and had tubes in her skin, everyone thought she would be fine and it would soon be over. But "a few months" turned into two long years. During that time her strength was an inspiration to me. When we played together, we would laugh and giggle, because we were both pretty young; she was only ten years old and I was only eight.

During the summer, it seemed that a miracle happened. For a few months the cancer was still. Kristina was home and it seemed that she was better, although she had a tube coming out of her chest that the doctors used for her chemotherapy. Because of that, she wasn't allowed to go swimming, but she still wanted to go to the beach with me and our little cousins. She had to wear a hat on the beach because she was bald. Her beautiful long brown hair had been lost. She would play with my long, blonde hair and whisper, "You're so lucky to have hair like this." I didn't understand. Inside I felt lonely and confused, but Kristina seemed to be okay with what was going on, and was really happy to be home with her family.

Kristina seemed to get better and she went back to school. She was through with her treatments and her hair started to grow back. Then early the next spring, she went back to the hospital for a checkup, and they found that Kristina's cancer had spread. We were all slowly losing hope though we

continued to pray. I didn't get to visit her for a while, but then when I finally saw her again, the look of joy and laughter were gone from her eyes.

That whole summer Kristina was in a wheelchair, and by August she had grown thinner and thinner. I wasn't allowed to see her any more because she was very tired all the time, and it was hard for her to breathe.. Our whole family knew she was dying. And she did, just like that. Even though we sort of expected it, it still hit everyone hard. Especially me. I sat quietly collecting the pieces of shattered memories in my soul.

At the funeral, our family sat in the back. The room was so crowded with people who loved her. I just looked straight ahead. I wanted to mourn but I couldn't. I would never accept her death and I didn't know why.

Then my Dad explained to me about the "Rainbow of Hope." It seems that before Kristina left us, her mom, my Aunt Kathy, had asked for one thing, She asked God for a sign that Kristina was safe with Him. The very next evening a huge rainbow appeared in the sky, and my Aunt Kathy knew that she had her answer.

After the funeral, we tossed Kristina's ashes into the sea near where we had scattered my Granny's ashes. On the way home, a glittering star of all colors was shining in the sky. It was Kristina smiling down on us in peace, tenderness and love.

In Kristina's honor, Aunt Kathy and Uncle John joined an organization to help raise money for children with cancer and blood diseases. That year my dad's whole family, and many friends, walked for Kristina in a fundraiser for the organization. We all walked proudly. Our group was called "Kristina's Krew." Every September we walk rain or shine.

The next year, Aunt Kathy designed a ribbon to bring awareness to people about childhood cancers. It has the rainbow on it that Kristina sent to us. Aunt Kathy went to our state government with her "Rainbow of Hope" pin, and New Jersey made it the official symbol for childhood cancer awareness in our state. The next year Aunt Kathy started her own website called "Kristina's Rainbows of Hope".

I am at ease now with Kristina's death, and have come to realize that everything happens for a reason. Because of Kristina, a lot of people will know more about the effects of childhood cancer and what how they can help children in treatment. I know that would make Kristina happy.