

# Meet our Patient Hero



## **Isiah** Leukemia Survivor

Isiah is a 16-year old junior who is currently attending St. Albans School in Washington DC. Like most young men, he enjoys most sports (especially lacrosse, football and basketball). Isiah is also involved in the Boy Scouts of America, having achieved the Rank of Life Scout (the last rank before Eagle) a few months ago.

Back in May 2014, Isiah was finishing up his freshmen year at St Albans. He had just finished the season playing for the St. Albans JV lacrosse team and shifted his focus to playing for a local club team. Soon after practices began, Isiah began experiencing headaches and a low grade fever as well as an overall lack of energy. Initially, we initially thought Isiah was coming down with a virus and that the symptoms would go away in a few days. Once the symptoms persisted for a week or so, we took Isiah to a local hospital emergency room. They found nothing as they only tested him for mononucleosis or Lyme disease. After an initial visit to Isiah's pediatrician yielded no insight, we scheduled a second appointment with another doctor at the same practice and he immediately ordered a Complete Blood Cell count (CBC) for Isiah. The results indicated a more serious condition and based on the doctor's advice, we immediately took him to Georgetown University Hospital's Pediatric Oncology unit for follow up and treatment. Doctors there told us that Isiah either had leukemia (more likely) or a virus that they were not familiar with (the CDC was also contacted). Subsequent testing (bone marrow biopsy) confirmed that Isiah had leukemia, specifically Acute Lymphoblastic Leukemia (ALL). The good news about the diagnosis was that the leukemia was only present in Isiah's bone marrow and had not spread to his blood stream or spinal fluid. Our family was initially shocked and very scared as most would be, but we relied on our strong faith in God and the doctors, nurses and staff at Georgetown to help Isiah and our family get through this.

Isiah started treatment almost immediately and his initial stay in the hospital was 32 days. The great news was that once doctors tested him after the initial phase of treatment, they found no molecular evidence of any leukemia cells in his body! That was in mid-July 2014 and Isiah has remained leukemia free since then. His treatment regimen would consist of another 9 months of relatively intense treatment (frequent clinic visits, several hospital stays, etc.). Because his immune system was compromised, Isiah was not allowed to physically attend school at St Albans for his sophomore year. Instead, he was enrolled in our local public high school via the Prince George's County Home and Hospital teaching program. Isiah's classes were all taken online, but the program provided tutors for certain subjects and they visited Isiah at home roughly twice a week. Isiah has an excellent sophomore year and is now enrolled back at St. Albans School for his Junior and Senior years.

Isiah entered the final phase of treatment (known as the Maintenance Phase) in April 2015. Isiah is happy to be back at St. Albans and to be with his friends and old classmates again. He will occasionally miss some class time for his (twice a month) visits to Georgetown for treatment (one for lab work only and one for chemo and other necessary treatment). Isiah also undergoes a spinal tap (including chemo delivered to the spinal fluid) approximately once every 3 months in addition to taking pills at home. This will continue until approximately November 2017 (Isiah will be a freshman in college then).

Throughout this ordeal, Isiah has demonstrated tremendous courage and has vowed to beat leukemia and resume a normal life. Because he has a port surgically implanted in his chest (until November 2017 when treatment is scheduled to end), Isiah, can't participate in any contact sports (including lacrosse, his favorite sport). During his treatment, Isiah has established friendships with several other patients who are close to his age and have also been diagnosed with cancer. The staff at Georgetown has asked him on occasion to meet new patients (and their families) to discuss his experiences and help them adjust to the treatment and life style changes they will encounter.