

Flashes of Hope rise in the world of pediatric cancer

Danielle Wiggins, WKYC 8:37 AM. EST December 14, 2016



Three weeks shy of delivering her second child, Allison Clarke of Chagrin Falls receives news no parent wants to hear. Her oldest, toddler Quinn, has cancer.

“He was about 20 months old and he just kept getting fevers and I kept taken him in and we couldn’t figure out what was wrong with him,” said Clarke.

“Suddenly we discovered that he had a big tumor that was growing inside of him. It was in his belly and it was the size of a football,” Allison’s husband Kip chimes in.

As the couple prepared to bring their first daughter into the world, they also did everything they could to give their son the best chance at a healthy life.

“They did a nine-hour surgery to take the tumor out and then we went right into chemo and radiation for a year,” says Allison Clarke.

FLASHES OF HOPE

After giving birth to a healthy baby girl and spending hours in the hospital with her son, mom had an idea.

“She kind of looked at me matter of fact and said ‘I know what I want to do with the rest of my life,’” Kip Clarke recalls.

“What happened was one of Quinn’s little friends passed away. I wondered if his mom had a photograph of him and that was the beginning of the whole thing,” Allison goes on to explain.

The determined mom developed the vision for what would be called Flashes of Hope in that hospital room while her son was napping. Three weeks later she pulled off the first photoshoot with professional stylists and photographers.

“We photograph children with cancer and give them these beautiful packages,” says Clarke.

“We knew at the very first shoot that it worked. We knew that we had to find a way to give this to as many kids as possible.”

Since the first photoshoot in 2001, [Flashes of Hope \(http://flashesofhope.org/\)](http://flashesofhope.org/) has grown to include chapters in over 50 cities across the country, photographing nearly 70,000 children free of charge. The nonprofit is volunteer driven and for 15 years Allison Clarke has not taken a salary for her work.

“What I’ve done is really not very extraordinary because I have an interest in doing it,” says Clarke. “What’s amazing is the people who have no connection to pediatric cancer and they’re volunteering, and they’re donating, and they’re getting involved in the cause. Those people are way more extraordinary than me.”

CANCER RETURNS

Quinn went on to recover from the illness. However, seven years after his initial diagnosis, his cancer returned.

“Everybody thought we were out of the woods so it was a real shocker to find this tumor,” says Kip Clarke.

This time the tumor was in Quinn’s hip and extremely rare. The Clarkes say the cancer’s return was the result of multiple factors including Quinn’s first cancer treatments and a condition he has called neurofibromatosis. The genetic disorder causes tumors to grow in the nervous system.

Unfortunately chemo and radiation treatments didn’t work.

“They sent us home on hospice and they told us there was nothing left they could do for him.”

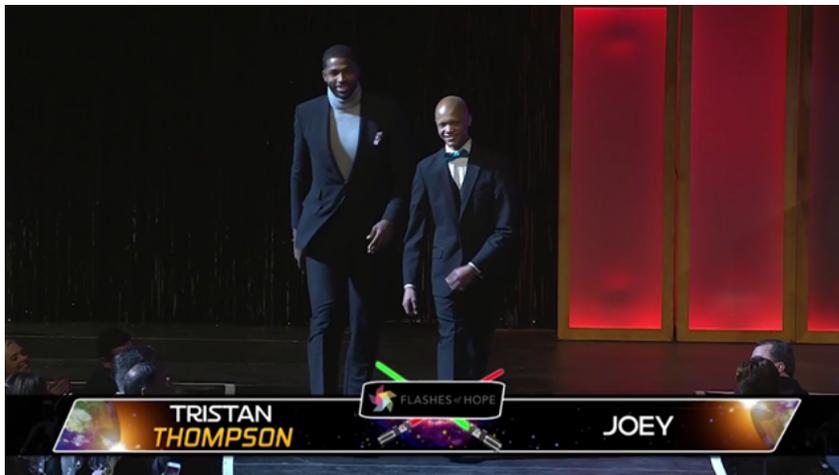
The Clarkes, who were now parents of three, found a doctor in Texas to treat their son. After another major surgery and participating in trial treatments, Quinn survived and is currently a cancer free 17-year-old high school junior.

“I’m a hard worker,” says Quinn Clarke. “I fight and I don’t really give up easily.”

FUNDING PEDIATRIC CANCER RESEARCH

In fact, it was the younger Clarke’s idea to raise money for cancer research. He sat his parents down while battling the second cancer and asked if they could organize a kick ball game to raise money. Days later, hundreds of people showed up to a Chagrin Falls field for the requested game.

“And that’s our goal, to raise enough money so that we don’t have as many kids to photograph because they’re cured and they’re not sick anymore,” says Allison Clarke. “We have a big event with the Cavs. Our annual [Big Shots and Little Stars](http://www.nba.com/cavaliers/community/big-shots-little-stars-161109) (<http://www.nba.com/cavaliers/community/big-shots-little-stars-161109>) event and that raises a million dollars every year.”



2016 Big Shots and Little Stars fundraising event (Courtesy: Cleveland Cavaliers)

The event pairs pediatric cancer patients and survivors in a runway show with the Cleveland Cavaliers and Northeast Ohio business leaders.

“They’re meeting all the players and all the big shots and then they get on the runway and there are 12 hundred people cheering for them,” Allison Clarke says with a smile. “They really feel like superstars.”

Today the Clarkes are experiencing the rainbow of smiles from families touched by life threatening illnesses because they chose to respond well to their storm.

“Even though I struggled, and my parents struggled, and my sisters struggled, my parents were able to come up with something that has helped out a lot of people and brought a lot of joy,” says Quinn Clarke.

“You know if you have means or you have talent, you have an obligation to do something with it,” says Allison Clarke. “To much is given, much is expected.”

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