

A Story Of Hope

Ryan Hi. I'm Ryan Davidson

Mallory I'm Mallory Davidson

Amy I'm Amy Davidson

Kirby I'm Kirby Davidson and this is our family's Easter story of hope.

Ryan Today I'm 14 years old, an 8th grader at Prairie View Middle School and feeling fine. However, that was not the case 8 years ago. When I was 6 years old and in Kindergarten I started having really bad headaches. One day that summer when I woke up I didn't feel quite right. I was trying to play video games and my left hand felt like it was asleep and wouldn't work right. I told my mom about it and she took me to the doctor.

Amy I remember when the doctor was checking Ryan and asked him to point with his finger on his left hand and instead of this...all he could do was this (point w/ bended finger). He then asked him to touch his finger and touch his nose and you could tell that this was difficult for Ryan to do. The doctor recommended that we have a CT scan. The scans were quick and they sent us home and said that the doctor would be in touch.

Mallory When Ryan got home he and I went over to a friends house to play. We had been there for about 15 minutes when my mom came over and talked to my friends mom. I could tell that something was wrong. She told Ryan that he needed to come home because they needed to go to the hospital for another check-up. I remember feeling really scared and sad for my brother and very uneasy about what was going on.

Amy I'll never forget the phone call that I received from the doctor. "Mrs. Davidson. Your son has a mass on his brain and we need to get him to the hospital." I was terrified. A neighbor who was a nurse offered to drive Ryan and I to the hospital. He and I pretty much cried all the way there.

Kirby I remember getting the call from Amy at work and she could hardly talk. When she finally got the words out I was in disbelief. I went into my boss' office and

started to tell him what was going on and tears started welling up in my eyes. He was a great guy and gave me a hug and then arranged for someone to drive me over to the hospital to be with Ryan and Amy.

- Ryan I was pretty scared when I got to the hospital. The only good thing about all of this was that I was getting rich. You see, every time the doctors or nurses told me I had to have an X-ray or a shot they had to pay me a dollar. At one point, I had dollar bills clinched in both of my hands when they hooked me up to an IV.....which, by they way, cost them an extra dollar.
- Amy Ryan looked so small hooked up to an IV laying in a hospital bed. The day before he was outside running and playing with his friends, and today he's in the hospital with a brain tumor. How could this be happening?
- Kirby We met with a surgeon that evening and he identified that they had found a tumor about the size of a walnut on the ride side of Ryan's brain. It was going to require surgery and they wanted to operate the next day. I remember calling our families that evening and how difficult it was to share the news. I expected my mom to cry, but when my dad cried...that was hard.
- Mallory When my dad got home from the hospital that night he picked me up at the neighbors house and brought me home. When we got home he asked me to sit down and I started crying and said "Just tell me what's going on with my brother!" He told me about the brain tumor and that Ryan was going to need surgery the next day. How could this be happening to Ryan?
- Amy The surgery the next day went well and they were able to remove all of the tumor. However the pathology report later did show that it was malignant and he would need to undergo treatments. Hearing the words "Your son has cancer" are words that I never thought I would hear. And now he was going to have to endure six weeks of daily radiation treatments, losing his hair, fatigue, and everything else that goes along with cancer treatments.
- Ryan When my parents sat down with me to tell me that I had cancer my biggest fear was that I was going to have to have another shot. I was sick of shots and MRI's! I started crying thinking about having another shot.
- Mallory When my mom told me the news all I could think about was my friend's grandmother who had died from cancer the week before. Hearing my brother's name and cancer in the same sentence was just not right. I couldn't believe that this was happening to him.
- Kirby At this point in our lives I have to admit, Amy and I were really questioning our faith. How could God let something like this happen to our son? What had we

done wrong to deserve this? We had always been active members in our church so what's the deal here?

Amy At one point I even admitted that I was mad at God.

Kirby Well, you're probably wondering...how is this a story of hope? This has been a pretty depressing story up to this point.

Mallory: Yeah Dad. It's pretty depressing for Easter morning.

Ryan: And, you're always such a "happy" guy!

Mallory How about how great our family, friends, and neighbors were. They brought meals every day for three months, arranged for house cleanings, transportation, shopping trips, and taking Ryan and I on fun excursions to keep our minds off of the big "C" word

Ryan And, just about every day for two months packages arrived at our house filled with toys for me and Mallory. My mom used to laugh at how excited I would get when the mailman was coming down the street.

Amy It took awhile but this dark cloud over our lives started to fade away. The love, support and care that we were receiving from so many people was lifting our spirits. It was giving us the inspiration and hope that we needed for this battle.

Kirby That's right. So, let's share some other positive things that were going on in our lives.

Ryan How about the Make-A-Wish Foundation!?! When I was 6 I was a huge NASCAR fan and my favorite driver was Bobby Labonte. The Make-A-Wish Foundation helped to arrange a great trip to the racetrack in California and a chance for me to meet Bobby in person.

Mallory They arranged to have a limousine pick us up at school. Our teachers knew in advance and had all of the kids line the sidewalk. They made signs and rolled out a red carpet. When Ryan came out the front door of the school everyone started cheering. Ryan had a huge smile on his face and it was a really emotional sendoff.

Ryan The trip was totally awesome. Our family spent a day at Disneyland, had a great hotel with a pool and room service, and really nice hosts. We got to go to the racetrack and go down in the garage area where I met Bobby at his trailer. I had worn my Bobby Labonte racing uniform that day so he knew that I was a big fan. We spent about 20 minutes with him and he answered all of my questions, signed a bunch of memorabilia along with my racing uniform and we got some pictures taken. It was one of the greatest days of my life.

- Mallory It definitely helped to take Ryan's mind off of doctors, hospitals, treatments, shots and gave him something positive to look forward to and enjoy. It's an experience that we'll never forget.
- Amy And, let's see...Ryan didn't we just watch a video of you with your favorite football team.
- Ryan Yeah. A friend of my dad's was on the USC football board of directors and found out that I had cancer and was a huge USC fan. He arranged for my dad and I to fly out to Los Angeles to see them play a game at the LA Coliseum.
- Kirby It turned out to be a lot more than just a football game.
- Ryan It sure did. They took me to practice the day before the game and I got to hang out with the team. Coach Pete Carroll took me into his office and we watched game films, I got to sit in on player meetings, and they took me out to the field for practice. I got to hang out with Matt Leinart, Reggie Bush, LenDale White and all of the guys. After practice they took me to the pep rally and then they gave me a USC duffel bag full of USC clothing. All of the players stopped by and autographed my USC football, too. The day of the game I got to go to a tailgate party and then had great seats to watch the game. They won a close game at the end 23-19 and our host surprised us with locker room passes. I was even on TV with Coach Carroll. It was great to see the guys after the game and it was a blast hanging out with them in the locker room after the big win.
- Kirby I think one of the most special times during that weekend came at the end of practice on Friday. All of the players gathered at the middle of the field and started whooping it up. They called out Ryan's name and pulled him into the center of the circle. Then they lifted him up onto their shoulders and started chanting "Ryan! Ryan! Ryan!" I wish you all could have seen the smile on his face.
- Amy And it didn't end there. The USC players stayed in touch and sent cards and letters to Ryan. The kicker, who had been in a bit of a slump, called Ryan the night before the big USC vs Notre Dame game and went out the next day and kicked three field goals and never missed again the rest of the year. Newspapers around the country picked up the special story of how the team had touched Ryan's life, and how he had touched their hearts. Matt Leinart, after winning the Heisman Trophy, sent Ryan an autographed Heisman football and photograph that said "To the bravest boy I know, Fight On! Matt Leinart."
- Kirby It was amazing to read the quotes from some of the players and coaches in the articles. Some said...
- "The kid has a great smile! He was such a bright light for our team."

- “I love that kid. He really lifted our team up during his visit. We’re all pulling for him.”
- “We dedicated the game to him and went out that day and played inspired football just for him.”

Mallory And it didn’t end there either...Between Ryan’s school and the USC football team they helped to arrange for our family to attend the Orange Bowl where the team played in the National Championship. Ryan got to hook up with the team at their hotel a few days before the game and they all stood and cheered when he walked into the meeting room. After that, he even got to ride on the team bus over to practice. They won the championship game, of course, 55-19 and it was just the frosting on the cake for a special season of USC football for Ryan and our family. By the way, Ryan has since been to see...

- USC beat Notre Dame in that thrilling game in South Bend
- The UCLA game where they clinched the Rose Bowl, and
- The 2006 Rose Bowl game in Pasadena.

Life’s rough isn’t it Ryan.

Ryan And there’s more...after Matt Leinart graduated from college he was drafted by the Arizona Cardinals. He contacted me last fall and invited me out for the Monday Night Football game against the Bears. He paid to fly my dad and I to Phoenix and put us up in a nice hotel. He had us over to his house (which is a really big house!) for a barbeque the night before the game. We also went over to the team headquarters where I got to go into the locker room and meet some of their star players. Matt arranged for me to have pre-game field passes and that was awesome. The crew from ESPN was on the field and did a special segment during their pre-game show on what Matt had done for me.

Kirby It was amazing to me that here’s a guy who is making millions of dollars as a highly-rated QB taken in the first round of the NFL draft and one of the first things he does is to do something nice for Ryan. He’s a real class act. You could tell that a special bond was developing between Matt and Ryan when they first met at USC.

Amy So as you can see, despite the negative experience that started nearly 8 years ago, we have a lot to be thankful for and a lot of reasons for hope.

Kirby People tell me all the time, “I just don’t think that I could endure what your family has been through.” And I quickly reply by saying...with all of the love, support and outstanding care that Ryan and our family have received over the past 8 years is it any wonder why he’s doing so well!

Amy And one thing that we didn’t mention is that when Ryan went in for his 5-year check up three years ago, in fact it was the day after Easter, the doctors found that his cancer had returned. It was devastating news. However, unlike the first time that we heard the news, this time we were more determined than ever

and inspired to move forward. Ryan had beaten it before and he could do it again. God is with us. There is hope.

Ryan However, I have to say that taking 10-15 pills a day for 18 months was not a lot of fun. I lost all of my hair again and wasn't able to attend school for more than just a few days at a time. But, today I'm fine and have been in remission for 3 years and a cancer survivor for a total of 8 years.

Mallory I'm really proud of Ryan. It's been fun to watch him enjoy all of the great experiences over his lifetime with so many great people. It's also been amazing to read the many stories, articles, and Internet postings that have been written about how they are just as touched and inspired from meeting him as he has been from meeting them.

Kirby Looking back over the past 8 years I reflect on the story in the Bible of when Jesus was in the wilderness. Although he was tested many times while he was in the valley the passage goes on to say that the whole time that he was in the wilderness that the angels attended to him. Jesus knew that God was with him and would see him through. There's a lot of relevance in this passage to our family's journey. We've persevered and have walked through the valley and have learned to trust in God.

Amy For God is not evil, or punishing us for something that we had done wrong. He is a loving God who we can turn to and pass our troubles over to. The Easter story and God's love for us is a gift of everlasting life for those who dedicate themselves to the Lord and profess their faith in God. We have placed our faith in God and that's what's helped to guide us through our wilderness.

Mallory One of my favorite songs is "No Day But Today" from the musical Rent. This song has a lot of relevance for our family and has words that I try to live my life by...

There's only us, there's only this
Forget regret, or life is yours to miss
No other road, no other way
No day but today

There's only now, there's only here
Give into love, or live in fear
No other path, no other way
No day but today

Ryan Being such a huge USC fan and having had such a great experience with the players and coaches, I've adopted the team motto of "Fight On!" I continue to

battle cancer every day of my life and I will continue to fight on. I will never forget the great experiences that I've had and the opportunity to meet all of the wonderful people who have come into my life. My life was changed forever on July 9, 1999...but it's not all bad. I have a lot of perseverance, determination, and hope going forward.

Amy We draw hope from the word of God and we also draw hope from each other. For it's not only our faith that has kept us strong the past few years but it's also the people who have lifted us up or come into our lives to show that there is still a lot of good in this world. There is hope for us all.

Kirby It's been amazing to watch God's plan for our family reveal itself over the past 8 years. As Pastor Scott said in his message on Saturday night, Easter is a reminder that when life is overwhelming – God is there. Who would have known that 8 years ago when Ryan was first diagnosed that we would be up here sharing our highs and lows of our family's journey. And, I reflect back on last Easter when Ryan had just finished up his 18 months of chemo, had lost all of his hair, was so weak that he had to be carried up the stairs to go to bed each night, and look at him here one year later!

And, God's not done with us yet. He's not done with any of us here today yet. Similar to the Easter story and how word spread of the good news, today is an opportunity for our family to share our story of good news...and hope.

Mallory Hope...to continue the battle

Amy Hope...to grow in our faith

Kirby Hope...to share with others

Ryan Hope...to beat cancer. Amen.