

**From the Principal's Pen**  
**May 2017**

**Submitted by: Jennifer McGee, Principal of the Atwood Primary School**

I know I have mentioned this before, but I am always struck by the differences in our journeys. As parents, we are all in this "parenting" thing together...but we are, in fact, separated in unique ways. No two parents ever have the exact same road to travel.

Jay and Erica Violette know that truth only too well. As parents of three children, they led an ordinary, busy life, running their own carpentry business...juggling the needs of their three children, two boys and a girl. But truthfully, they can barely remember their lives prior to the year 2010. In 2010, everything changed. When I asked them about their life *before*, Dad said, "It's hard to remember, but it must have been simple."

Their oldest daughter, Mikayla, was 10 years old...almost 11. She was a student at Williams Elementary School, a blonde-haired beauty, who came to them complaining of a bump on her scapula. They brought her to the doctor's office, and she was placed in a sling....but it got increasingly worse, quickly. Within a week, the bump bubbled up beneath her skin...and it hurt to sleep. Jay and Erica brought her for an ultrasound, and by the end of the evening, they got a phone call they will never forget. "We are so sorry to tell you this. Your daughter has cancer."

And then, the world as they knew it ceased to exist.

As parents we have choices to make. We choose what activities our children are going to be involved in. We choose their bedtimes and their meals. We choose who to invite for play dates. Erica and Jay Violette, owners of a construction business, not medical practitioners, had to choose what course of treatment their ten year old would receive. One pathway of an aggressive surgery would leave her without use of her arm, would leave her unable to comb that beautiful blonde hair. The other pathway was risky, but would give her more options for the use of her arm. They chose the proton treatment.

And so it began. Erica and Jay would "take turns" working. Sometimes neither of them could work. They spent their time in the Lafayette Cancer Center in Brewer and at Mass General in Boston. Their entire family moved into Christopher's Haven for three months. Christopher's Haven is a *"home for when cancer hits home"* for children and their families. They were within walking distance of Mass General. Erica became trained in giving injections using an orange, and she would give Mikayla shots of neupogen in her belly at night to boost her daughter's white blood cell count.

The Violette's remarkably had many happy memories from those days in Boston. The whole family was together, and because the actual treatments lasted only 30 minutes, when Mikayla was well enough, they would go to the Boston Aquarium or they would walk to Quincy Market. When Mikayla was "not accessed" with a needle in her port, they would go swimming in a pool across the street. Some days Mikayla would surprise everyone, and within an hour of her treatment she would be ready to go play on her scooter. She never ceased to amaze her family with her strength and humor and courage.

They also discovered the beauty of random acts of kindness. If Mikayla was feverish in the night, any number of family members would drop everything, at any hour, and arrive at the

house, ready to help with the boys. Complete strangers would send gas cards, fill their oil tank, send packages and gifts to Mikayla, pay for their stay at Christopher's Haven. As construction workers, the people they were working for were always willing to wait for jobs to get done...allowing Erica and Jay to put family first. They also learned that someone always had it worse. They would sit in the cancer treatment center with their ten year old, and another parent would walk in holding their sick baby. Mikayla, a girl with a HUGE heart, always felt sad when she would see the babies.

Mikayla began her treatments as an eleven year old, and at age twelve, with her family watching, she "rang the bell", signifying the end of her treatments...a "bald beauty", holding her Certificate of Completion!

Every three months, Mikayla has to go for her check ups...CT scans and X-rays. At her one year check up, when Mikayla was 13, she was re-diagnosed with a tumor on her lung. Mom and Dad agreed that her surgery was "awful". She had to have a drain in her lung for the entire 6 days following her surgery and it was painful...and Dad said that has been the hardest part as a parent. Mom and Dad agreed...having NO control as a parent...no control over what your child has to endure. When Mikayla has said, "No, I don't want to have chemo," and they have had to say, "Yes, you are doing this." Knowing, she has to get sick to get well.

The week before Mikayla's check ups, Jay and Erica begin to get nervous. They are sleepless. Last week was Mikayla's one year check up. Her scan was clear!

**AND THIS IS WHY** we do our fundraiser and our walk for Relay for Life. Mikayla's most recent treatment was a brand new chemotherapy. This particular chemotherapy was the result of research and developed by The American Cancer Society.

Mikayla is now a gorgeous and healthy 15 year old. She can throw a Frisbee with her arm, and she can nearly raise her arm straight up over her head. She is an honor roll student and is taking drivers' ed. She loves school! Her hair is growing back, and her mother braided her hair last week for the first time in over four years.

This is the story of one family. So many families have stories of how cancer has impacted their own families. Join our walk on May 1 at 8:30. Let's lock arms to fight CANCER.

Educationally Yours in the Fight,

Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School

Dates to Note:

May 1: Relay for Life Parade 8:30 to 9:30/ Wear purple and bring a donation!

May 19: KIDS DAY/ Northeast Expo field trip for grades k - 2

May 29: NO SCHOOL/ Memorial Day

