

## Harmen's Story



In 2006, when I was seventeen years old, at the pinnacle of my high school career, I was diagnosed with leukemia. I was taken out of school, off the basketball team and thrown into the hospital. Endless potential memories taken from me as I now battle this disease - basketball games, social events, banquets and parties all skipped for treatments and checkups.

As I progressed through my treatments, I would face many complications resulting in more hospital stays, many lasting several weeks at a time. I met with doctors, nurses, social workers, art therapists and many other caring people to help me and my family through this tough time. One of the social workers informed me about the Starlight program. At first, I didn't consider the idea too seriously, but my

family and I registered for the program regardless, which I soon put in the back of my mind.

At first I was hesitant to take up such a gracious offer as I did not see myself fitting for a wish. I concluded to myself that I did not earn such a reward. However, I would go on to consider everything that I have been through and how a wish would help me to feel better mentally. Time went by and I was still unsure of my wish. But I soon started to regain my strength and good health and the idea became more prevalent.

In late 2006, I was in the maintenance phase of my treatment schedule and I started to get back to good health. With treatments only once a month I became stronger and once again ready to lead a normal life. It was not till mid 2008 that I was feeling myself again, and with a second chance at good health, I decided that a triathlon was just the challenge I needed. And with that I decided that a bicycle was just the wish I could use. My family and I contacted the Starlight organization and I told them about my idea. Soon thereafter, I was blessed with a shopping spree wish and granted an amount of money towards my purchase. I felt so honoured and ready to get my life back on track.

In early 2009, I started to train for my first triathlon, which would be set for June. Being winter, I was not quite ready to jump on my new bike. But the day it became warm enough to ride, I was out training to get ready for my huge undertaking. I would ride every day I was able. By June I was ready. The day was nerve wrecking, but I was ready.

A 750 meter swim, a 30km bike, and a 5km run all seemed like peanuts compared to the cancer I just beat. I placed about half way down the list, sitting at about 300 out of 600 overall. I was ecstatic to have taken, trained for and beaten this challenge.

In September of 2009 I completed my second triathlon and I'm now training for my first Olympic distance triathlon (1.5 km swim, 40km bike, and 10km run). I owe the completion of my triathlon to the Starlight Children's Foundation. Thank you for helping me feel normal again, helping me to achieve my dreams. I've put countless kilometers on my bike and am continuously looking for new races and challenges to ride. I am very gracious to Starlight for granting me this wonderful wish. Thank you, Starlight!