

Kavina's Story

Kavina was diagnosed with cancer - ALL Leukemia on December 30, 2003, when she was just 6 years old. As parents, it was the most difficult thing to hear. The news and the aftermath uprooted our family and those around us in a way we could never have imagined. Kavina was our only child at that time – the one we had hoped and prayed to have for so long. The thought of our sweet little girl going through chemotherapy and its terrible side effects was bad enough. Thoughts of whether or not she would make it through were unbearable.

We tried so hard to carry on a normal life as advised by the doctors and nurses, but it meant one of us had to stop working and take care of Kavina full time. We went from working professionals to healthcare giver, home school teacher, advocate and watch dog.

As for Kavina, the impact was even more distressing. All of a sudden she found herself in the hospital having to take medication after medication and not really understanding why. She resented us for the first 10 days because she could not understand why her parents were making her take all these medicines. Kavina had to remain in isolation during this time and we explained all that we could to her as we, ourselves became more educated about leukemia. We told her we would not give up and that she needed to fight hard as well. We would be by her side every step of the way.

Children with cancer must suffer many terrible side effects and Kavina was no exception...the emotional stress of losing her hair, the weight gain and mood swings that caused by certain medications, vomiting, missing school and the friends she loved so much. It is amazing how the general mood of the family is governed by how happy (or sad) your child is feeling. If Kavina was feeling sick, we would be down as well, but always trying desperately to bring her spirits up.

We found ourselves becoming a part of a community that no one would ever want to be a member of and one that the outside world could not comprehend...a community of parents fighting for our children's lives. Along the way, there have been wonderful people and organizations who have lessened our pain and brought smiles and happiness to our family. We will always remember the close ties we have made with other families going through the same experience, caring healthcare workers and volunteers at the hospital and the fantastic people at the Starlight Children's Foundation.

We were first told about Starlight shortly after Kavina's diagnosis. They informed us of a special room in the hospital dedicated to those seriously ill children in the hospital, a special place for the kids to go and "just be kids". The "Starlight Room" was a place that Kavina often enjoyed and spent countless hours throughout her chemotherapy treatments. Kavina especially loved the arts and crafts, playing video games or just sitting out on the rooftop getting some fresh air.

Kavina was very excited to learn she had been accepted into the Starlight Wish Program and would be granted a once-in-a-lifetime wish of her choosing! We decided to wait until she was more stable before discussing wish choices, which was in itself quite a task for Kavina because she really wanted it to be special. The possibilities were endless. Would she choose a trip to Disneyworld or perhaps a bedroom makeover?

Kavina remembered a past family trip to Florida where she had to be hospitalized. During that time, she watched back to back episodes of a certain television show on the Disney Channel for 4 days straight...there's not much else to do when you are in hospital and in complete isolation! The show

was Hannah Montana and Kavina was mesmerized by the star of the show, Miley Cyrus. Kavina informed us her wish was to travel to Los Angeles with her family to visit the set of Hannah Montana and meet Miley Cyrus in person! WOW, talk about big league! Could Starlight really make this wish come true?

Starlight assured us that they would do their very best to fulfill this wish, however sometimes celebrity wishes could take some time to come to fruition. This did not discourage Kavina in any way. She was very patient and more than happy to wait for as long as she had to. During this “waiting period” our family experienced two major events which we would forever be grateful for. Kavina became a big sister to a brand new baby brother and she completed all her treatments. Kavina has been chemo free with 2 years under her belt and counting! Our wish as Kavina’s parents had come true!

Now with Hannah Montana merchandise in every corner of every store and the Miley Cyrus frenzy all around, we received a phone call from Connie at Starlight informing us that Kavina’s wish was about to come true. Kavina was beside herself with much excitement and disbelief. Knowing that we had come down to the wire, Kavina was desperate to prepare us with Hannah Montana trivia. She insisted we learn all the actors names and their character names, before meeting Miley Cyrus and the cast.

A week prior to departure a “wish package” was delivered to our home. We were expecting an envelope with some airline tickets but instead it was a huge box! We were so excited for Kavina and wanted to make the surprise extra fun so we decided to hide the box in the bathtub until she arrived home from school. We made a treasure hunt out of the whole thing!! Inside the box was not only a detailed itinerary, but gifts for Kavina as well as a gift for her little brother...the looks on their faces were priceless! As parents, our jaws dropped to the ground and tears of joy filled our eyes. It is truly amazing how a simple package can bring so much happiness to one family!

Starlight planned a fabulous and unforgettable wish. Not only were we going to meet Miley and the cast and crew in California, we were also given passes to Universal Studios, Disneyland, Sea World, and a private VIP tour of Paramount Studios! Starlight provided us with the funds we would need for food, rental vehicle and even souvenirs for the children. They left nothing to chance and we were excited and grateful beyond words.

Our visit with Miley turned out to be so much more than we expected. First we met with a Starlight volunteer in L.A. named Rich, who was so kind and caring. He snapped pictures along side us parents, as if Kavina was his own daughter! We started off by having lunch with the cast and crew, got showered with gifts, and spent time visiting the different sets of Hannah Montana. We were allowed to roam throughout and around the sets, looking at all the props and equipment. We spent a total of 4.5 hours in the studio and the smile on Kavina’s face during this whole time was unforgettable.

Miley’s visit with our family was very special and personal. We were invited into her dressing room where we talked to her about her pets and her love for music. She introduced us to her puppy, Sofie and even played a few cords of her guitar for us. We were all star struck and very impressed with Miley and her down to earth qualities, family values and her talents!

The following day we had a private tour scheduled at Paramount Studios. Our tour guide Sabi, was absolutely fantastic. Not knowing what to expect, a 2 hour tour turned out to be more than 4 hours. Sabi made every effort in going into each studio asking for special permission to visit the set. We

visited the sets of “Dr. Phil”, “Kath and Kim”, and even saw some taping of the “True Jackson VP” show.

The most memorable moments of the Paramount Studios tour was our 2 hour visit to the “Priviledged” set. It was like an impromptu 2nd wish. The cast and crew rolled out the red carpet for Kavina. They had her wired up in no time yelling ‘rolling’ to the camera men. At one point she was whisked off to wardrobe and the make-up trailer with Joanna Garcia and Anne Archer. She operated one of the cameras with a crew member and was even given autographed photos and scripts. Wow what an ending to an already fabulous wish!!

By the end of our trip we had captured over 1700 pictures. We experienced several of those “full circle” moments. Just a few years ago, we were shedding tears of sadness yet who would have imagined that we would be experiencing such happiness for our little girl. The tears of joy were endless during the simple moments of receiving a package to boarding the plane; from spending time with Miley and her costars to meeting the “Priviledged” cast and crew; from visiting Disneyland and Universal Studios to our stay in a beautiful hotel. WOW, what a wish this turned out to be!!!

I truly believe that happiness plays a crucial role in healing and if it wasn’t for Kavina being her happy go lucky self, she would never have gotten through this ordeal. Starlight Children’s Foundation is definitely a part of the “happiness” concept. Being in the hospital and away from family and friends was always difficult and at times unbearable, but knowing that we could spend time in the Starlight room made it a whole lot easier. The anticipation of Kavina’s wish gave her (and us) something wonderful to look forward to and a reason to keep up the good fight. We have to say that it is a bittersweet fact that it took cancer to have Kavina experience such great people and unforgettable adventures, however a big Thank You goes out to those at the Starlight Children’s Foundation for generating those tears of happiness and for all the happy memories they have brought to our family and to countless others.