

Stacy McCloskey gives a big hug to her son Christopher, who has been on the path to healing since being diagnosed with Legg-Calve-Perthes disease in early 2010

Christopher's Courageous Journey

*Written by Stacy McCloskey
Photos by Andres Quintero*

How my son overcame a childhood bone disease, while finding inspiration to help others

Christopher's journey began in summer 2009. He was a very active 9-year-old who loved life and enjoyed playing flag football, basketball, baseball, and soccer. Everything was going his way, until he started to have sharp stabbing pains in his stomach – pain so severe, he would lie on the floor until it subsided. None of us knew at the time that it was deferred pain from his hips. Our pediatrician diagnosed it as growing pains and suggested that Christopher eat healthier. Then, like magic, it went away for nine months.

The Game That Changed Everything

Christopher continued to play sports and was on the Katy Youth Basketball Cougars team. During a game on Feb. 26, 2010, an opponent forgot which sport he was playing and tackled Christopher on the court. He flew three feet up in the air and landed very hard on his right hip. After the game, he started to have a severe limp but said he wasn't hurting.

Our pediatrician thought it was a pulled muscle and told us to come back if it lingered more than a couple of weeks. We returned the third week to have X-rays and expected a diagnosis of all clear. This seemed so minor, and it surely was a pulled muscle. We were not prepared for what she was about to tell us. Christopher had a very rare hip disease called Legg-Calve-Perthes disease (LCPD). A crippling, degenerative disease of the hip, LCPD causes the bone to die and affects 1 in 1,200 children yearly in the U.S. Typically, it takes three to five years to see bone regrowth.

Taking Time Out

We immediately went to see the top pediatric orthopedic surgeons in the Houston area; each one had a different treatment plan. One wanted to put Christopher in petrie casts that made an "A" shape for four years and said he would be in a wheelchair most of his life. The last orthopedic surgeon said Christopher only had LCPD in the right hip.



Christopher is dedicated to raising awareness of LCPD



Christopher began having sharp stabbing pains in his stomach when he was 9. When he developed a severe limp after being hit at a basketball game, his pediatrician diagnosed him with LCPD.



To help others with LCPD, Christopher recently raised \$6,000 for the Save-A-Limb Ride in Baltimore



Throughout his struggle with the rare bone disease, Christopher has relied on support and encouragement from his family

He scheduled an MRI and concluded it was Meyer dysplasia, instead of LCPD. He advised that Christopher would grow out of the condition and didn't need any further treatment.

Until then, we were told to limit Christopher's activities – so no tackle football, basketball, recess, or PE for the next six months – and to come back before the 2010 school year started. It was a wait-and-see approach with no therapy involved.

It was very difficult for Christopher, because he was told not to run or jump. How do you slow down a 10-year-old boy? His speed was always fast and faster, and now it had become slow and slower. He realized he couldn't play tackle football, even though we had already purchased \$400 worth of equipment. So instead, he wore his football uniform as his Halloween costume. He chose to support his basketball team as the team manager responsible for stats. He longed

to play, but sat on the sidelines. His team went on to win the championship that season.

A Scary Setback

On Aug. 18, 2010 we went back to our pediatric orthopedic surgeon and he told us that Christopher's X-rays showed a big improvement. He said that Christopher had grown out of the condition and released him back to full contact sports. This was music to our ears. We let Christopher go out for flag football, even though he wanted to do tackle. With his dad coaching the team, they won the championship that season. Everything was going great.

Then, basketball season began. Christopher started limping on the left side after practice one day. We visited our orthopedic surgeon on Dec. 30, 2010 and he delivered the bad news: He had been mistaken in his diagnosis and said Christopher had LCPD.

We were devastated. In the emotions of the moment, all I could keep thinking about was finding the next expert. We had done everything humanly possible to ensure that Christopher got well, and I felt like we had fallen short. It wasn't the physicians' fault; LCPD is a very rare disease that is often misdiagnosed.

Finding Support and Resources

I decided to join a Facebook LCPD group, which became our strong support system. We gained a family overnight. Everyone in the group is either going through LCPD, has battled it, or knows of someone facing the condition. Through the support group, I found several new experts in the industry. I sent Christopher's X-rays to all three of them and then prayed for God's guidance on where to go. Dr. Shawn Standard from Baltimore answered first. He immediately put Christopher on a stretching regimen with regular swimming. He wasn't even our physician yet, and he was already taking care of us.

Dr. Standard and his team offer a Web chat every two weeks to help families with LCPD find answers. During one of those chats, he confirmed that Christopher had LCPD in both hips and suggested that we go visit him. We learned that Christopher's left hipbone was completely gone, but that we still had a chance to save the right hip.

We made our first visit to Baltimore on Feb. 9, and Christopher had his first round of surgery, with a bone

marrow transplant, core decompression, and Botox injections. On April 29, the left side was operated on using the same procedures.

Healing While Helping Others

In most cases of LCPD, it takes a long time to see bone regrowth. Christopher's bone regrowth occurred six weeks after the operations – six weeks! He was the third patient under Dr. Standard to have this advanced procedure.

Christopher spent the last few months of fourth grade at home healing. This is when we saw a significant change in him. He realized that sports no longer defined him and that he wanted to help others. He started fifth grade at James Williams Elementary, where he is involved in student council, the WISE Aerospace program, the Fish Club, and Boy Scouts. His doctor said he is beating all the odds, and he is definitely our walking miracle. We are so proud of his attitude and ability to realize the strength inside him.

There is no known cause or cure for this disease, and Christopher wants to change this. He recently raised \$6,000 for the Save-A-Limb Ride and rode seven miles in the event on Oct. 22 in Baltimore. This charity gives much-needed research funding to the physicians that gave him such hope. **KM**

EDITOR'S NOTE: We would like to thank Stacy McCloskey for sharing her family's story of hope, determination, and courage. If you have an inspirational story you would like to share, email editor@katymagazine.com.



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