

Jill Guerrero, who is expecting another boy in May, became her son's "momcologist" when he was diagnosed with leukemia at 3 years old

*"Luke and I are each other's hero. We have fought a tough road together."*

- Jill Guerrero

Photo by Sara Isola

# Luke's Legion

Katy mom Jill Guerrero fights not only for her son Luke, but for other children around the globe who are battling childhood cancer

*Written by Lacey Kupfer Wulf | Select photography courtesy of the Guerrero family*

Jill and Aaron Guerrero with their son Luke



Luke's Legion has raised over \$60,000 for childhood cancer research



Raising a toddler is full of challenges, but battling childhood cancer should not be one of them. Jill Guerrero and her son Luke fought to save his life from leukemia and, with the help of Luke's Legion, help others by raising funds for childhood cancer research.

### Momcologist

In March 2013, Jill noticed that Luke, 3 years old at the time, seemed unusually lethargic and pale. When the doctors gave her and her husband Aaron the news that Luke had leukemia and they needed to begin treatment right away, she was in total shock. "I didn't know much about leukemia at the time, and it was all very overwhelming," she shares.

Soon after Luke's diagnosis, however, Jill stepped up and became a "momcologist," knowing every detail of her son's treatment, administering medicines, cleaning PICC lines used in chemotherapy, spending day and night by Luke's side, and doing so much more.

### Temporary Inconveniences

Although Luke's leukemia went into remission rather quickly, Luke's liver struggled to process the drugs and was severely damaged. Also, as a result of his treatment, he experienced pancreatitis, the loss of lateral eye movement, and the use of his legs. During this frightening time, Jill focused on being her son's strength. "I was focused on how to make him better, unable to accept any alternative but that he would eventually get better." With time away from treatment and physical therapy, these harmful side effects eventually reversed, giving Luke and Jill hope for a full recovery.

Hospital visits and medication became a normal part of life for Luke. "Despite his difficulties in treatment, Luke has taken it all in stride, learning that all the 'pokes,' etc., that come with treatment are temporary inconveniences," says Jill.

### Finding Gratitude

Even on the hardest days, Jill found something to be grateful for. "I got through them by focusing on what was going well. His cancer was in remission, and we were in a top-notch medical facility getting the best care available. I made a list every day of what I was thankful for. Some days it was merely that there was a Chick-fil-A in the hospital, but there is always something to be thankful for." Her gratitude list is much longer, especially now that Luke is cancer-

free and doesn't seem to remember the early days of fighting for his life.

### Forming Luke's Legion

The Guerreros' support system was working long before Luke's Legion officially began. "I was so completely surrounded with love and support from our family and our church family that no need went unmet," says Jill. Throughout Luke's treatment, family, friends, and members of the community provided meals, house cleaning, toys for Luke, yard care, financial support, and prayers. Even Luke's specialists and oncologists helped by making Luke as comfortable as possible and playing with him to distract him during more unpleasant parts of treatment.

Yet the Guerrero family wanted to do something more to find safer treatments for childhood cancer. Jill says, "While the treatments are great in eliminating the cancer, they are still so hard on the little bodies fighting." Luke's reaction to the drugs is just one example of how some treatments can harm a child's body while trying to eliminate cancer.

At the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society's annual Light the Night Walk in October 2013, Luke's Legion was born and formed the largest team walking that year. Between the 2013 and 2014 Light the Night Walks, Luke's Legion raised about \$50,000 for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. In 2015, Luke's Legion raised about \$12,000 for the Cancer Center at Texas Children's Hospital. In the future, the Guerrero family hopes to continue to find creative ways to support Texas Children's Hospital's cancer research.

### Winning the Fight

"I think Luke and I are each other's hero. We have fought a tough road together. He has learned to trust me when I tell him the yucky thing is something we just have to do, and I have watched an amazing young boy endure what no child should, and thrive," Jill says.

Luke "rang the bell," signaling the end of treatment in October 2015. Although they return to the clinic for monthly check-ups, Luke is healthy and began kindergarten last fall. **KM**

*LACEY KUPFER WULF is a freelance writer and mother to twin toddler boys.*



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