

# Survival and Hope Life After Cancer



## About Me:

**CITY:** Spring Valley Lake

**JOB TITLE:** Just finished cosmetology school and will take state boards in June

**FAMILY:** Graice House, 39, mother

**HOBBIES:** I love doing nails and hair, gardening and exercising

**PHILOSOPHY:** Live by God. I have a verse: Hebrew 6:19 "Hope anchors the soul."

*"I have a new normal, but I am the same person"*



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**If you or someone you know would like to be featured in this series, please contact Liz McGiffin at [liz.mcgiffin@cancer.org](mailto:liz.mcgiffin@cancer.org).**

## Genesis Crafton, 19 Type of Cancer: Acute T-cell nonHodgkin lymphoblastic lymphoma

By Alberta Hale Crigler

Genesis Crafton was 13 when she began experiencing symptoms of the cancer that nearly took her life.

"I had a cold that wouldn't go away," she said. "I had been to several doctors. Throughout the week I was getting worse and worse. I was having trouble breathing. I was coughing, and my chest and ribs were hurting. I had really bad neck pain.

"I knew something was really bad. We went to St. Mary on Jan. 27, 2013. My oxygen was at 80 percent, they gave me a breathing treatment and did a chest X-ray. The next day doctors did a bone marrow biopsy and placed a chest tube and picc line."

A radiologist noticed a suspicious dark space in Crafton's X-ray and a CT scan was done.

"In the X-ray, my whole chest was blacked out and they assumed it was fluid. But it was a 10 cm mass on top of everything else," Crafton said.

"Once they got the CT, everything changed," said Graice House, Crafton's mother.

St. Mary immediately contacted other hospitals that were better equipped to treat Crafton's very rare and life-threatening condition.

"They called hospitals and whoever came first was going to take her," House said. "Loma Linda was the one that picked her up.

"When we got to Loma Linda, the white coats were waiting for us, and 15 to 20 doctors took her from me. By the terminology they were using, I knew it was serious.

"When they sat us down and told us what she had, I asked, 'Can we get a second opinion?' They said, 'No, we are starting chemotherapy right now - there is no time.'

"My head was spinning - I couldn't even pronounce what she had, let alone call my family and explain what was going on. The doctor said her prognosis was day by day, minute by minute. They didn't give me false hope, but they didn't say she wasn't going to make it."

"Loma Linda never could determine if she had a positive (for cancer cells) in her spine and brain," House said. "They just assumed it was, although the albuterol can get a false positive."

"The mass was in my upper chest cavity, and both lungs had collapsed," Crafton said. "My heart was at the tip of my rib cage - the pressure of the fluid had pushed it down, and everything had moved around it.

"I was pretty scared for my life. With my type of cancer, there was no protocol. Every month the tumor board would meet with my doctors to review what was going on and what changes could be made.

"With being stage 4, I was put on a high-risk protocol."

"She had so many surgeries the first few days," House said.

"With experimental stuff, all bets are off. It is like playing Russian roulette."

Crafton suffered vascular necrosis as a result of her chemo's toxicity. "Both of her legs were clinically dead," said House. "At one point, they were going to amputate her legs. Loma Linda did research on her because she was the first person to have rejuvenation in bone and tissue regions with vascular necrosis.

Crafton had chemotherapy treatments for 2 1/2 years. When she rapidly lost weight, going from 100 pounds to 70, drug toxicity



caused irreversible frontal lobe brain damage.

"As a parent, I have never seen anyone handle anything so gracefully," House said. "She never broke. She was just, 'Let's do this; I want to get on with my life.'

"It was hard watching a child going through so many adult things. So many of us gained strength through her. She has had more than 30 spinal taps. They would remove fluid and inject chemo in place of spinal fluid to protect her brain."

Crafton had her last chemo on June 10, 2015.

"Our nurses became our family," House said. "We are still in contact with them. You meet people along the way that give you that support that you are not alone.

"We had so many friends who were dying - kids who didn't make it. We got to where we couldn't go to one more funeral. For anybody who goes through that, life is a little more precious."

## A new normal:

Genesis Crafton was diagnosed with cancer near the end of eighth grade.

"I literally never went back to school from the day I was hospitalized," she said.

"There was a time when I was in ICU, and when I went home, I had to be isolated in my room because I had no immune system.

"When I could go out, I had to wear a mask and sanitize everything I touched. Chemo wiped out my hormonal changes that happen at puberty. I haven't gotten any taller or heavier than I was at 13.

"I have a new normal, but I am the same person," she said. "I am: 'I will show 'em.' Going through cancer made me a better person. You see life in a different way."

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