

MORE THAN A DIAGNOSIS

TREMAINE BARRETT



Tacara Alson, Tremaine's mom, shared Tremaine's story with us as part of our *More Than a Diagnosis* series.

A TOUGH BOY WITH A LOVE FOR FOOTBALL

Before cancer entered his life, Tremaine was a quiet, tough 13-year-old who loved football. He enjoyed video games, watching movies and, of course, anything involving football. He was the kind of kid who didn't complain much—even when something hurt. That toughness would become an important part of Tremaine's story.

Last summer, Tremaine began limping and his knee was swollen. His family thought it was a football injury, so they iced it, elevated it and assumed it would get better. But Tremaine didn't complain. "He was in pain during that time, but he never told me," his mom, Tacara, recalls. "He would just really tough it out."

When school started, Tremaine went to football practice on the first day. His coach noticed that something wasn't right with his knee and told him to go to the doctor and find out what was going on before continuing to play. That decision would change everything.



WHEN THE DIAGNOSIS CAME

As the summer continued, Tacara noticed other changes. Tremaine was losing weight, although she initially thought it was simply because he was growing taller. Then his toenail began turning black. Tacara did what many parents do when something seems unusual—she searched the internet. When cancer appeared in the search results, she immediately dismissed the possibility. "I was like, 'No, Tremaine doesn't have cancer.' I just never thought that."

But eventually, the doctors confirmed what no parent ever expects to hear. Tremaine had osteosarcoma, a type of bone cancer, in his femur.

"I couldn't believe it," Tacara says. "I cried all day that day."

Then she had to tell Tremaine. It took her some time to find the words, and when she finally told him, Tremaine cried. According to Tacara, it was the only time she saw him cry during the entire experience.

After telling Tremaine, she had to tell the rest of the family. In those first moments, Tacara didn't spend her energy asking, "Why me?" Instead, she prayed: "God, just get us through it. Please just get us through it."

WHEN CANCER CHANGES THE WHOLE FAMILY

A childhood cancer diagnosis doesn't just change a child's life. It changes the life of an entire family. For Tacara, one of the biggest challenges was simply figuring out how to get Tremaine to Charlotte for treatment. She didn't have reliable transportation, and Tremaine's treatment required frequent trips to Atrium Health Levine Children's Hospital.

Transportation through Medicaid eventually helped, but it wasn't always simple. Because discharge times could change, there were times when Tremaine was ready to leave the hospital but their ride wasn't available. There were occasions when he would be discharged at 3 p.m., but they would still be waiting for transportation home at 8 p.m. Sometimes they had to use an Uber to get home.

While Tacara, a single mom, was focused on Tremaine's treatment, she also had another child at home who needed her. Her 11-year-old son often stayed with her sister while Tacara was away. During Tremaine's surgery, Tacara and Tremaine had to stay in the Charlotte area for about three months.

Her youngest son missed his mom. When Tacara finally returned home, she noticed signs of anger in him, and he began therapy to help him work through what he had experienced.



"It was just a lot," Tacara says. "People don't understand everything that's going on."

Her main focus was making sure Tremaine was okay through chemotherapy and surgery. She was with him through every visit, from September through May. Tremaine's father and grandparents were there in the beginning, but Tacara was the one who remained by his side throughout the treatment journey.

A COMMUNITY THAT SHOWED UP

Although the journey was difficult, Tacara says her family was surrounded by support. Laura Fedak, President of Live Like Madison, was the first person in the community to reach out after Tremaine's football coach learned about his diagnosis.

"She was actually the first supporter," Tacara says.

Support came from their local community and from churches in Charlotte. People prayed, checked on the family and helped in practical ways. One of the things that meant the most was simply having people recognize that the family needed help.

As Tacara prepared to leave home for three months during Tremaine's surgery and treatment, Laura came by. She brought things the family would need and helped Tacara think about things she might not have considered. Tacara remembers one particular gift: a blanket. The place where they were staying was freezing, and the blanket became something they genuinely needed.

But it wasn't just the things Laura brought.

"She came and she hugged me and we cried," Tacara remembers.

Another small act of kindness came from a nurse on Mother's Day. Tacara was in the hospital with Tremaine, focused completely on being his caretaker. With her own mother having passed away, Mother's Day was already a difficult day for her. Then one of Tremaine's nurses gave her a Mother's Day card.

"That touched my heart," Tacara says.

For a moment, she was reminded that she wasn't only a caretaker.

"I am a mother."

During months of hospital stays and medical appointments, that simple reminder meant more than the nurse probably realized.

WHAT TREMAINE TAUGHT HIS MOM

Through everything, Tremaine continued to show the strength that had always been part of his personality. Tacara says the experience taught her not to complain about the little things.



"...Tremaine continued to show the strength that had always been part of his personality."

Tacara, Tremaine's mom

"What do I look like complaining, 'Oh, I don't have this done?'" she says. "And this boy is going through it."

Watching Tremaine endure chemotherapy, surgery and everything that came with his diagnosis changed her perspective. She learned to be thankful for what she had. "Just be happy with what you got and thank God."

Tremaine also saw other children going through cancer treatment while he was in the hospital. He saw babies crying and other young people facing their own battles. Seeing what other families were experiencing made him even stronger.

THE TREATMENT JOURNEY

Tremaine's treatment was a long and difficult process. He received chemotherapy, underwent surgery and then continued chemotherapy afterward. His surgery involved removing the affected portion around his knee and replacing the knee with a long rod used as part of the reconstruction.

For Tacara, there were moments when the amount of medical information felt overwhelming. At the beginning, she didn't realize that surgery would be followed by additional chemotherapy.

The hospital provided a large notebook filled with medical information, treatment schedules and calendars. At first, it seemed overwhelming, but it eventually became an invaluable tool for keeping track of appointments and everything the family needed to know.

"I still have it," Tacara says. "I'm glad because I wondered, how do you keep up with all of this stuff?"

THE DAY TREMAINE RANG THE BELL

After months of chemotherapy, surgery and hospital stays, Tremaine finally reached a milestone his family had been waiting for.

On June 24, 2026, Tremaine rang the bell. For Tacara, the moment was almost impossible to put into words. "It felt very, very good," she says. "I just didn't know I was gonna cry." Then she hugged her son. "It was just like, wow. This journey is over."

Looking back, Tacara says the entire experience almost feels as though it happened incredibly quickly. "It went so fast," she says. "That's how I know God was in the midst of it." There were certainly moments when it didn't feel fast—especially during the hardest days in the hospital. But now, looking back, Tacara sees God's presence throughout the journey.

FINDING THEIR NEW NORMAL

Today, Tremaine is cancer-free. For Tacara, moving forward means something surprisingly simple. She wants her family to put this experience behind them and get back to normal life.

She wants Tremaine to finish high school. She wants her older child to finish college. She wants her youngest son to continue growing and finding his own way. And she wants to be home.

After spending so much time away for treatment, coming home became something she treasured.

"I was so glad to come home that I didn't even care about going on vacation. I just wanted to be home. In my bed."

Now they're beginning to enjoy some of those ordinary things again.

The family recently returned from a trip to Myrtle Beach.

For Tacara, those aren't just vacations. They're signs that life is moving forward.

"Just back to normal life."

And perhaps that's what she wants most—not anything extraordinary, but the freedom to enjoy the ordinary moments that cancer once interrupted.



WHAT HOPE MEANS NOW

For Tacara, hope has taken on a deeper meaning.

“Hope means that I feel like with God, anything is possible.”

Her faith doesn't mean she believes life will never be difficult. Instead, she believes that God will help her family through whatever comes.

When she thinks about other families facing a childhood cancer diagnosis, Tacara has simple advice: “Keep talking to God and pray to God, because He will get you through it.”

She also encourages parents to stay close to their child's medical team, ask questions and reach out to their community. “You never know who can help.”

Before Tremaine's diagnosis, Tacara didn't realize how many children and families in her own community had been touched by childhood cancer. Now she does. And she hopes other families will know they don't have to face it alone.

A FUTURE WITHOUT CHILDHOOD CANCER

Tremaine's journey has given Tacara a new understanding of just how difficult childhood cancer treatment can be. She hopes that one day, children won't have to endure months of chemotherapy, lengthy hospital stays and major surgeries just to have a chance at getting well.

“I just hope that they can find something quicker, and just get rid of it just like that,” she says. “Like you just take a pill or a shot, and it goes away.”

During Tremaine's treatment, doctors asked Tacara if they could study his tumor and collect blood samples as part of research efforts. Knowing that Tremaine's experience could potentially help researchers learn more gives her hope for other children.

She thinks about the children she saw in the hospital who didn't get the outcome her family received.

“I feel so bad about the people who didn't make it—the kids who didn't make it.”

Her gratitude for Tremaine's recovery is inseparable from her hope that other families will someday receive the same outcome.

For Tacara, that is what the future should look like: more answers, better treatments, less time in the hospital and, ultimately, a world where children don't have to fight cancer at all.

**Tremaine is more than his diagnosis.
He is a son, a brother, an athlete, and a fighter.**



His story is still being written.

EVERY CHILD HAS A STORY.

MORE THAN A DIAGNOSIS

Live Like
MADISON
COMFORT • CARE • CURE