



### PETITION TO INCREASE FEDERAL FUNDING FOR CHILDHOOD CANCER RESEARCH

Yvonne Bell-Alanis, aka “Monkey” was diagnosed with Acute myeloid leukemia on March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2017 at the age of 15 years old. AML is a type of cancer of the blood and bone marrow with excess immature white blood cells. This type of cancer progresses rapidly, with myeloid cells interfering with the production of normal white blood cells, red blood cells, and platelets. It can cause many different signs and symptoms which can include fatigue, weakness, pale skin and shortness of breath. The 5-year survival rate for children under the age of 20 years old is 69%. AML is fairly rare overall, accounting for only 1% of all cancers.

Yvonne began experiencing a runny nose, fatigue, nausea, low-grade fevers, bruising easily and body aches. She was sick for several months. Upon taking her to see doctors, we kept constantly being told she had the common cold and the body aches could be attributed to growing pains. At no time did they swab her throat, draw any blood or do any cultures on her. Although I asked them to do this several times, I was just told it was not necessary and sent home with an antibiotic. After several months of doctors' visits, she began coughing up blood. I immediately took her to the ER and blood tests were finally done. Her white

blood cell count was over 81,000 which was a sign that there was something definitely wrong. We were told she had cancer. I could not even grasp the thought of my child having this disease. Those words were something I never thought I would hear. I was angry, sad, scared and confused. It was something I knew I would have to accept but was not sure how I was going to be able to.

Yvonne was given one round of chemotherapy and then on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2017 she had a bone marrow transplant which is often common for this type of cancer. She did extremely well for the first 51 days after surgery. After her first round of chemotherapy, she began feeling better and was in remission. She then ended up with a double lung infection (Aspergillosis). She had to have double lung surgery due to the infection right before her 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. Yvonne ended up losing 15% of each lung. To this day we are still not aware of how she got this type of fungal infection. We only know it was caused from breathing in mold spores. Something we will have to live with wondering the rest of our lives.

During the last 3 days of her life, I wanted to be the only one to take care of her. I did not sleep that entire time. She was in a coma and I held her in my arms doing all I could to comfort her. I whispered to her how much I loved her and told her that she did not have to fight any longer. I told her how much her siblings and I would miss her and that we would never forget her. She opened her eyes for the first time since being in a coma on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Yvonne looked at me with those big blue eyes and took her last breath which was on her sister's 1<sup>st</sup> birthday. My beautiful daughter was gone. Sadly, what ended her life was the GvHD (graft versus host disease). Her body rejected the bone marrow transplant even though it was a 10 out of 10 match. I will never be the same person since losing Yvonne. Her siblings will never be the same either. She was not only my daughter but she was my best friend. She fought so hard to stay with us but I know she was exhausted from her fight. I had to let her go even if I was not ready to.

Since my daughter passed, I have worked with several families across the country trying to help raise awareness with my foundation. This foundation

provides resources for financial funding and also provides resources for the siblings of those fighting cancer or who have lost a sibling to cancer. This is something I am dedicated to and very passionate about. Siblings deserve to also be heard and be able to express their grief to others but often they choose to say nothing so that no additional stress is added upon their parents. I will do whatever I can to fight this terrible disease and help anyone going through it. However, I cannot do this alone.

Approximately 10,470 children in the United States under the age of 15 will be diagnosed with cancer in 2022. Globally, approximately 300,000 children are diagnosed with childhood cancer each year. On average, about 16% of children die within 5 years of diagnosis. This is far too many children suffering or dying because of this disease. The federal government at this time is allocating an insufficient 4% for funding for childhood cancer research. This is not nearly enough funding. It is so important that we do all we can to see this percentage rise to 8%. By signing this petition, you will aide in facilitating lobbying and the advance of a healthcare policy that will assign a higher percentage of resources for childhood cancer research. Please stand with me and so many others to sign and share this petition. Let's be the voice for all these children suffering and those who lost their battle.

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